

Mediterranean Crisis

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

PACIFIC SCENE
AMERICAN SCENE

MEDITERRANEAN CRISIS

By
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To
JESSE HEITNER

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

While this book was in the press under the original title of MEDITERRANEAN SCENE, recent events have shown that it is far from being a mere 'Scene.' It has therefore been retitled.

Contents

PART I

	PAGE
AUTHOR'S NOTE	ix
CHAPTER	
I. BETWEEN TWO WARS	3
II. THE RAPE OF SPAIN	21
III. EAST END	60
IV. THE UNHOLY ROMAN EMPIRE	81

PART II

I. FRANCE HOLDS THE STAGE	113
II. BACK-DOOR COLONIES	143
III. THE PART ENGLAND PLAYS	150
IV. AFRICA ON THE MEDITERRANEAN	181

PART III

I. CORSICAN BALLYHOO	209
II. WHOSE SEA?	216
III. WAR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN	232
IV. MEDITERRANEAN BLUES	238
AFTERTHOUGHT	246
POSTSCRIPT	249
INDEX	251

Author's Note

NOT until I came to check and counter-check figures used in this book did I realise that it was possible for compilers of books of reference to disagree even as ordinary mortals do, one with the other. For instance, the total length of the coastline of Italy may be 2,000 miles according to one authority, and more than 4,000 miles according to another. I have taken the lower figure because I did not wish to count in the circumferences of various very small and unimportant islands.

French books of reference do not tally with certain British books concerning the population of Morocco; I have accepted the French figures because I think the French should know more about their own concern than we do. And so on. How many Italians fought in Spain? I have taken an average figure based on reports from Government Spain and General Franco.

—[*Author's Note*]—

I have done my best to control every figure in this book, but if any of my figures are found to be controversial, I must plead in advance that the figures form part of a controversial subject.

H. J. G.

Paris, January, 1939.

Part I

Between Two Wars

WHEN the bugles sounded the "Cease Fire" in November 1918, British prestige stood on a higher level than it had ever done since 1899, on the eve of the Boer War.

One million dead was the price England paid for this return of her prestige, yet the gain was tremendous. Not only was the enemy of the moment, Germany, out of the way, but other enemies, past and of the potential future, were also in the dust. Russia, the arch and traditional enemy of Great Britain, had been defeated by Germany and rent by revolution. The enmity of Austria reached back far into the nineteenth century. Austria, too, was smashed. Turkey was defeated, except for a small band of unruly men under the leadership of one Mustapha Kemal who appeared to be creating trouble in the Anatolian Desert. France, who might have fought hard for her spoils of victory, appeared to be bled white.

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

The Balkan countries had been rolled flat. Great Britain and France together had financed and manœuvred a revolution in Greece, and Greece was out of the picture. True, the Greeks were at war with the Turks, but we, the English, were at the back of the Greeks, so all seemed well. And Italy, what of Italy?

Italy had turned her back on her two allies, Germany and Austria, and had come into the War on the side of the allies of England. Italy had demanded her thirty pieces of silver, and a secret Treaty of London agreed how this blood-money should be paid. But Italy had merely limped to victory on Franco-British crutches. She had been held up until the end of the War. It did not seem that she would be in any position to demand payment of her blood-money. Nobody thought or bothered about Spain.

The most important matter to Great Britain, so far as Italy was concerned and the other countries whose territories bordered the Mediterranean, was that Britain's lines of communication with the East were intact. For some hectic moments during the World War there had been grave danger to British ships going to and from Australia and India, but the alarm had passed; German submarine warfare had taken its toll of British ships, but when the bugles sounded the "Cease Fire"

there seemed nothing dangerous to darken the Mediterranean Scene.

Twenty years have passed since Great Britain seemed not only mistress of the Mediterranean but very much a monarch of all she surveyed. What then caused this transformation; this changing of conditions which have reacted so unfavourably to Great Britain? Some blame the fact that Italy was prevented from receiving her just rights. Others say, and maybe they are correct, that the trouble was that Italy grew up too late to take her place among the nations who were carving, or had carved, Empires. Some may think that personalities have played their part in shaping policies which have changed the situation in the Mediterranean for the worse. It is possible that there are still others who believe that the personalities I have in mind, and whose names I shall give, were not those who dictated the policies, but rather those who acted when the policies had taken shape. Let us see.

A little light on the secret history which lies behind the shaping of Mediterranean policies was shed by Mr. Lloyd George when he wrote: "The Secret Treaty by which Constantinople and the Straits, and half the province of Armenia, were to be placed under the dominion of the Tsars, had been promptly

repudiated by the Russian Bolsheviks. What then was to be done with them?

“The Straits might have been handed over to Greece with much historical and ethical justification. Constantinople was once the capital of the renowned and resplendent Greek Empire, and the shores of the Straits, with the adjacent islands, were populated by millions of Greeks. That might have been a solution, but nobody realised better than Venizelos that it would have encountered the open hostility and the more formidable clandestine opposition of France.

“Another alternative would have been the internationalisation of the Straits. This implied the setting up of an international commission of control, on which Britain, France, America and Italy would certainly have been represented. . . .”

We see, then, that already behind the scenes in Paris where the Peace was being made, there was strife. We know, of course, there was strife as regards Germany and Austria and Poland and various other parts of the mainland of Europe, but here we are already on the very shores of the Mediterranean. We see that Soviet Russia refused to except a mandate over half of the province of Armenia, and we know that the United States refused a mandate over the other half of Armenia.

—[*Between Two Wars*]—

In 1920, 7,000 Armenians were massacred by the Turks. In June 1920 the British and the Turks were fighting at Ismid. The same year saw the return of King Constantine to Greece, a country from which he had been expelled by the machinations of Great Britain and France, acting in concert with M. Venizelos. In 1920, also, there was other trouble in the Mediterranean. Gabriele d'Annunzio declared war against Italy, which resulted in the Fiume fiasco. All that belongs to history.

In 1921 there were further troubles in the eastern part of the Mediterranean; there were riots in Egypt and fighting in Turkey.

In 1922 Mustapha Kemal, who had emerged from the Anatolian Desert, caused the British Fleet to be concentrated in Turkish waters to prevent the Turks crossing back into Europe out of which they had been driven during the World War.

In 1923 the Italians bombarded Corfu, and the curtain rose on the first act of the Mediterranean drama. . . .

Let us go back to 1915 for a few moments, while the secret Treaty of London is being signed. The Treaty was signed between the representatives of Italy, France, Great Britain and Russia on April 26th, 1915. It was the document which settled the price Italy was to be paid for turning traitor. Article 4 of

this secret Treaty says: “Under the Treaty of Peace, Italy shall obtain the Trentino, Cisalpine Tyrol, with its geographical and natural frontier (the Brenner), as well as Trieste, the counties of Gorizia and Gradisia or Istria, as far as the Quarnero and including Volosca and the Istrian Islands of Cherso and Lussin, as well as the small Islands of . . .” The islands are small unimportant ones on the rocky coast of Italy. Article 5 says:

“Italy shall also be given the province of Dalmatia within its present administrative boundaries, including to the North Lissarica and Tribania; to the South as far as a line starting from . . .” The rest of this Article also deals with small and unimportant rocky islands.

It was, however, stipulated that the coast of the Adriatic which was not Italian was to be neutralised with the exception of the coast of Montenegro. It is interesting to recall that the Queen of Italy is the daughter of the late King of Montenegro.

Article 9 says: “Generally speaking, France, Great Britain and Russia recognise that Italy is interested in the maintenance of the balance of power in the Mediterranean, and that, in the event of the total or partial partition of Turkey in Asia, she ought to obtain a just share of the Mediterranean region adjacent to the province of Adelia, where Italy has already acquired

rights and interests which formed the subject of an Italo-British convention. The zone which shall eventually be allotted to Italy shall be delimited at the proper time, due account being taken of the existing interests of France and Great Britain.

“The interests of Italy shall also be taken into consideration in the event of the territorial integrity of the Turkish Empire being maintained and of alterations being made in the zones of interest of the Powers.

“If France, Great Britain or Russia occupy any territories in Turkey or in Asia during the course of the War, the Mediterranean region bordering on the province of Adelia within the limits indicated above will be reserved to Italy, who shall be entitled to occupy . . .”

Nonsense.

It was all nonsense; sheer humbug, that secret Treaty of London. The Powers at war with Germany desired that Italy should come in on their side. I do not doubt for one moment that Italy also desired to come in because she thought that if the Allies lost, she would be at the mercy of Germany and Austria; if the Allies won, then Italy might have a share of the spoils. It was perfectly justifiable for Italy to take what advantage she could of the situation. It is clearly established, then, that the foundation of the present so-called Roman

Empire dates back to 1915 and that Great Britain, France and Russia were at least responsible for sponsoring the genesis of this Empire. Mussolini has been lauded and blamed for what he has done or is alleged to have done in carving out a new Empire, but if we face up to the plain facts of the case, we must find that this ex-Socialist who for so long fought against everything for which he is now fighting, took advantage of the situation which he had done nothing whatsoever to create.

If I had to name the men I consider primarily responsible for the situation in the Mediterranean to-day, I would say they were: Raymond Poincaré, Abd-el-Krim, Count Romanones, and His Most Catholic Majesty Alfonso XIII of Spain.

When the World War broke out, Raymond Poincaré, President of the French Republic, was travelling back from a State visit to St. Petersburg. He returned sure and certain that France's ally, Russia, was ready and willing to help her crush Germany in the war of revenge—whenever it came. The war-time history of Russia proved M. Poincaré wrong, and he never forgave Russia for having proved him wrong. Poincaré was a son of Lorraine, a department of France which was one of the windows looking on to Germany. M. Poincaré hated the Germans as only a Lorrainer can.

M. Poincaré was a lawyer; he had the thin air of the French Law Courts always about him. He adored logic. He was a fierce patriot, but he could not lead France because of his hatreds. It is an historical fact that it was M. Poincaré who prevented Franco-German relations improving so long as he was in office. It is not so much the Treaty of Versailles as the late Raymond Poincaré who is responsible for the present situation in Germany, yet M. Poincaré was to live to do yet another disservice to the country he loved so much. He was the man who first picked a quarrel with Italy after the War. When France needed the friendship of Italy just as much as she needs the friendship of England to-day, M. Poincaré refused to come to terms with Italy concerning the status of Italians in France. He wanted the sons of Italian parents to serve in the French Army. This led to a furious personal quarrel with the Italian Ambassador and, gradually, to the worsening of relations between Paris and Rome.

With the part King Alfonso of Spain, Count Romanones and Abd-el-Krim played on the Mediterranean stage, I shall deal in later chapters, but let us now cross the Mediterranean to Greece where, at the time when Mussolini was bombarding Corfu, another revolution was on the point of breaking out. King George of Greece, now back again on his

throne, was, at the moment when Mussolini's ships were firing shells at Greek goat-herds, a prisoner in his Palace.

Many writers and speakers have discussed possible reasons why this bombardment of Corfu took place. It will be recalled that the ostensible reason was that an Italian General and four other Italian officers had been found murdered. It was assumed by Mussolini that the murderers were Greeks. Without waiting for any enquiry, Mussolini bombarded the undefended island of Corfu, and at the same time made humiliating demands on Greece. I was in the Balkans myself at that moment. Thanks to the intervention of Great Britain, Greece did not have to fulfil the humiliating conditions Mussolini wished to impose. It has been suggested that Mussolini intended to seize the island of Corfu and annex it. This I do not believe, but I do believe that the real clue to the puzzle of the bombardment of Corfu may be found in the fact that at the moment the bombardment took place, the Council of the League of Nations was in session in Geneva. Mussolini had always hated the League of Nations. Mr. John Gunther in *Inside Europe* puts forward the interesting theory that part, at least, of Mussolini's hatred of the League is due to the fact that during his Socialist days when he escaped from Italy into

Switzerland and was chased from pillar to post by the Swiss police, he was arrested in Geneva and made to submit to the indignity of having his finger-prints taken. This theory may be a little far-fetched, but there are many reasons for knowing that Mussolini, ever since the conception of the League, has been opposed to it.

Years before Italy decided to leave the League, Mussolini had been threatening to do so. During the international outcry which followed the bombardment of Corfu, Mussolini said: "Italian public opinion does not like the League of Nations, for a very good reason. We respect its aim, but I completely deny its authority to intervene in a matter affecting Italian honour. The present affair does not come under the League Covenant, as there is no danger of war."

It may be recalled that already as long ago as the bombardment of Corfu, which took place on August 31st, 1923, there were demands for military and economic sanctions to be taken against Italy. When these demands became clamorous, Mussolini stated: "In case the Council of the League of Nations shall declare itself competent, the question whether to remain in or to resign from the League of Nations will arise in Italy. I have already voted for the second solution."

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

The bombardment of Corfu was a demonstration against Geneva. Mussolini felt that the League would stop short as soon as he started. Mussolini was right, and how right he was became more and more apparent as the years rolled by and Mussolini was able to take other stands against the League.

In this section of the book I am not attempting to deal in any detail with the various important factors which have changed the Mediterranean Scene. I am trying at the moment to give a general picture, and then, later, I want to divide this picture up into sections. There is no denying that the part Mussolini has played has been a dominating one, yet I must insist once again that he was, and is, an opportunist. He takes advantage of situations and dramatises them. The Italians love drama. There is a story told of an Italian officer who, during the World War, jumped on the parapet of a trench and waved his sword in the face of the enemy, and cried: "*Avanti.*" All the troops in the trenches applauded and shouted: "*Bravissimo.*" I think the Italian people are still crying "*Bravissimo*" to Mussolini, but will they leap over the parapet, should he ever ask them to do so?

Opportunist Mussolini has seized the occasion of stirring up trouble in the eastern end of the Mediterranean, where he himself

had ambitions not so long after the bombardment of Corfu. Long before he decided to go into the Abyssinian adventure, Benito Mussolini had his eye on the fat lands of Anatolia. Mustapha Kemal had fear of Italy, and therefore played for the friendship of Russia, but the Lone Grey Wolf of Turkey managed later on to borrow money from Italy just as he had borrowed money from Russia. Neither Italy nor Russia are very keen on foreign loans, but Mustapha Kemal managed to obtain money from both countries and use it to the best advantage: to prepare the defences of Turkey against an attack by the one or the other. Mussolini finally decided that any attempt to seize Turkish territory was too dangerous, so he left Turkey alone and turned his eyes to the east coast of Africa, but that is another story.

The part Mustapha Kemal played in shaping events in the eastern Mediterranean during the first years following the victory of the Allies cannot be overestimated. While the Turks and the Greeks fought in the hinterland of Turkey, in Constantinople the Allied representatives were at loggerheads. It is still not definitely known from which source Mustapha Kemal obtained the arms with which he successfully fought the Greeks. There were, at one time, strong suspicions that although Italy was

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

officially represented in Constantinople, Mustapha Kemal was receiving arms from Italian sources. There are also reasons to believe that many arms were stolen by secret societies in the part of Turkish territory held by the Allies. Following in the footsteps of another great Liberal statesman, W. E. Gladstone, Mr. Lloyd George cordially hated the Turks. Accordingly, he gave wholehearted support to the Greeks. It was very likely the blunders of policy of the years 1919 to 1922 which helped to turn events in the Mediterranean against Great Britain.

The first fatal mistake was made in Paris when too little attention was paid to the fate of Turkey. Mr. Lloyd George's advisers seemed to believe that all that was necessary was to leave matters to the Greeks, who would finally dispose of the Turks, and then Turkey could be carved up among the Allies. Everything that was said and done was reported to Mustapha Kemal, whose hatred of the English was fed daily by stories which were being reported to him. That hatred of England never died.

How much, one wonders, did Greece directly and indirectly cost the British taxpayer in those first few years after the Peace was signed? A British Minister in the Balkans said to me once during those years: "Our trade in the

—[*Between Two Wars*]—

Levant has received a smashing body blow from which we shall not recover for twenty years." That was said in 1923, just after the Mudania Armistice, which put an end to the Turko-Greek war. The history of the British pro-Greek policy, which led up to the final fiasco, was one long series of Mediterranean blunders.

The late Sir Basil Zaharoff acted as intermediary between M. Venizelos and Mr. Lloyd George. Sir Basil convinced Mr. Lloyd George that M. Venizelos was the one man who could bring Greece into the War on the side of the Allies. This he was never able to do, but, incidentally, what he did do was to bring about a revolution in Greece which caused much trouble during the War. It was after the War, however, that the real trouble arose.

After we had given Smyrna to the Italians, we gave it to the Greeks, who were driven out of it by the Turks. For years Great Britain treated Mustapha Kemal as if he were a brigand. Time and time again, reports were sent to the Foreign Office in London from political officers in the Near East; all the reports stated that Mustapha Kemal was growing both in military and political power.

In October 1922, just after the burning of Smyrna, I witnessed the migration of nearly a quarter of a million men, women and children. It was the removal of the Greeks from Turkish

territory. Nothing like it had been seen since the Israelites left Egypt. I saw the emigrants crossing the Maritza River, fleeing from Adrianople, which the Allies had given to the Turks although they had given the same town to the Greeks in March of the same year.

The long series of blunders in the Mediterranean led finally to Chanak, where England was almost at war with Turkey once again. The victorious Turkish Army, having disposed of the Greeks, appeared ready to tackle the British. Constantinople at that time was in the hands of a puny Turkish Government. It did not remain very long after the Chanak crisis, because the Sultan fled in fear of Kemal the Conqueror.

What a mad place Constantinople was in those days! The ancient city was crowded with British, French, Italians, and Americans; the Americans did not have troops, but they had sailors; the American High Commissioner was Admiral Bristol. The gallant Admiral will long be remembered in Turkish waters. The British had a supply ship called *Dago*. The American Fleet ran short of fresh meat and asked the British if they could supply some. The British Admiral flagged this message: "Please indent on *Dago*." And the Americans were stopped just in time from asking the Italians to let them have some meat. For-

fortunately there was no international incident; it might have been very serious, because in those days all the nations treated each other very caustically. The Americans were always getting into trouble with the French because they used to steal the hats of French sailors. Dignified protests would pass from the French flagship to the American. When the Chanak crisis occurred, the Italians and the French stood politely aside and allowed the British to bear the brunt of the trouble. There again one finds one of the mainsprings of the present situation in the Mediterranean. French and British interests were in conflict. The Italians played a lone hand.

The Russian White Army under General Wrangel which had been defeated by the Bolsheviks in the Crimea was evacuated by British ships to Constantinople. And Constantinople became a gayer place than ever. Just when the British seemed about to go to war again in Turkey, Constantinople was much like Brussels must have been on the eve of Waterloo. There was a Russian Ballet in the cabaret known as the Petits Champs. The dancers were late officers of the Wrangel Army, and the wives of the officers took part in it. The Company made its own dresses and its own scenery. Night after night there were scenes of rollicking gaiety; men had just

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

come out of one war and seemed about to go into another. The crisis, the supreme crisis, was averted when Mr. Bonar Law wrote a letter to *The Times* and so brought down the Lloyd George Government, thus putting an end to the hopes of the Greeks.

This Mediterranean medley of madness was caused by wrong-headed policy in London and an anti-British policy in Paris, where M. Poincaré was intriguing with Turkey through the medium of the late M. Franklin-Bouillon, who went into Anatolia to negotiate a secret treaty with Mustapha Kemal.

Mr. Bonar Law started a new line of policy, and in the course of time the Allied occupation of Constantinople came to an end and the Turkish conqueror made an entry into the former capital. Never again will Constantinople know such days and nights as it did during the last months of the occupation. Never again, it is to be hoped, will such blunders be made, even though it has appeared during the last few years that British foreign policy has once again made serious mistakes in the Mediterranean; but may it not be accepted that if the earlier mistakes had not been made, then the mistakes which arose after the Abyssinian conflict would not have occurred? It was men, personalities, and not politics which caused these mistakes.

★ II ★

The Rape of Spain

ONE summer's day in 1917 a slightly built man might have been seen limping up the carriage drive of a fine house in the Castellana, Madrid. He was wearing a dark business suit and a bowler hat, and because he was club-footed he walked with the aid of a stick. He was Count Romanones, the greatest land-owner in the country and the Grey Eminence of His Most Catholic Majesty King Alfonso XIII of Spain.

Count Romanones had just come from the Royal Palace where he had had an audience with the King. The officers of the Spanish Army were in revolt. They had formed *juntas*, committees to deal with the question of promotion. That was the first crack in the edifice of the Spanish Monarchy.

Count Romanones had played an important part behind the scenes in the forty-odd years of the King's life. Many times the Count had

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

been Prime Minister; many Cabinets had he broken up. He was not only the richest, but undoubtedly the most powerful man in the country. It was Count Romanones who first saw the few-hour-old baby King who was born six months after the death of his father. It was Count Romanones who showed the baby Sovereign to the members of the Government, according to the old traditions of the Court of Spain.

At the moment when we saw the Count limping along in the street, the Germans were a grave menace to Spain. At the time the World War began, there were 7,000 Germans and Austrians living in the country. In 1917 there were 70,000. They had swarmed from the South American States and other countries which were at war with the Allies. Not only was Spain honeycombed with German and Austrian spies, but German submarines were using Spanish ports as their bases. There were German wireless sets scattered all along the long coast-line of Spain. King Alfonso had said: "Only the riff-raff of the country and myself are pro-Ally." He was almost one-hundred-per-cent right. His mother, the Queen Mother, was formerly an Austrian Princess. The Church in Spain and the aristocracy were both pro-German. If Germany had won the war it would not have been Italy who would have been the enemy of Great Britain in the

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

Mediterranean to-day. The Mediterranean would have been a German sea.

Many books have been written in many languages about the War which broke out in Spain in 1936, which, for want of a better name, we still call a Civil War, but few writers have gone far enough back into the past to discover its roots. There seems to be an idea, and a very wrong idea it is, that the war in Spain is a fight against Bolshevism. It is nothing of the kind. It is a war of aggression against Spain. There are newspapers which refer to the Insurgent as the Nationalist Government, and they call the legally elected Government of Spain the Red Government. At the time of writing there is one Communist member of the Spanish Government. When the war began, there was not one Communist in the Spanish Government. At the time the present war began, the Government of Spain was leaning towards the Right. There had been a rebellion against the Republican Government of Spain, but this rebellion did not come from the Right, it came from the Left, the Extreme Left, because it was believed, principally by the miners of the Asturias, that the Republican Government was becoming too reactionary. What an ironic thought that is to-day.

The first seeds of discontent in Spain were sown, not by the people themselves, not the

ordinary man in the street or the peasant, but by the Army; it was the officers who started all the trouble which led to the overthrow of the Monarchy. There were too many officers in the Spanish Army during the days of the Monarchy. It was difficult for the officers, specially for the young officers of the World War period, to obtain advancement. The King of Spain began to blunder badly when he played with the idea of setting up a dictatorship in Spain similar to the dictatorship which had begun in Italy under Mussolini. Perhaps it was the discontent in the Spanish Army which made King Alfonso afraid of the future. The Army which had always been the support of the Throne had now become an enemy instead of a friend. The King could count on the rank and file, but he could not be sure of the officers. It was essential, he thought, to take some step to put an end to discontent. He thought the best thing to do was to stifle it.

After consulting Count Romanones, King Alfonso decided that General Primo de Rivera was the best man to be Dictator of Spain. It was arranged that the dictatorship should last for ninety days and at the end of that time there should be a return to Constitutional Government. There is very little doubt that this idea, once in the King's mind, remained an obsession with him. Time after

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

time he put off the moment when the *coup* was to take place, but very soon his hand was forced. The revolt in Spanish Morocco came as a godsend to the King. It gave the Army something to do. If Spanish officers were killed, so much the better; it would make room for others; it would assist promotion. The Riff troops were not braver than the Spanish soldiers, but the Spanish soldiers were very badly supplied with food and munitions. There was so much corruption in Spain. The war which began almost as light-heartedly, so far as the Spaniards were concerned, as the British war with the Boers, developed very soon into a great disaster.

The King of Spain is a very sentimental man. A Spanish journalist who accompanied the King when he visited Spanish Morocco told me that when the King visited a Spanish military cemetery he looked around him and them, putting his gloved hand in front of his eyes, he burst into tears. The King wept once again when in Madrid he heard from the British Military Attaché the tales of the sufferings of the British recruits in the Spanish Foreign Legion who had fought in Morocco. These men, poor dupes, were so badly treated that the British Foreign Office had to intervene and the men were repatriated to England. Crossing Spain, they stayed some hours

in Madrid, where the British Military Attaché talked to them and obtained their stories. The Spanish war in Morocco was the beginning of the end of the Monarchy. The country, as I saw it at that time, was full of walking wounded. The King and Queen who had been so popular among the masses were now looked upon with a gloomy eye. I happened to be in Madrid when the King returned from Morocco. He drove through the streets and there was hardly a cheer. The priests had taken school-children out and told them to wave their hands and shout. They did, but nobody else did.

After the series of disasters in Spanish North Africa, the Spanish Parliament demanded that an enquiry should be held, and those who were responsible were to shoulder their responsibilities. The King, acting on his own initiative, decided on a *coup d'état*, and with the help of General Martinez Anito and General Milans del Posch, who were both staying in San Sebastian, he declared a dictatorship on September 13th, 1924. The cost of living during the six and a half years that the dictatorship lasted continually rose. This made the dictatorship unpopular. King Alfonso, who had taken a trip to Rome to see his Royal cousin, the King of Italy, took General Primo de Rivera along with him.

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

With a gay laugh he introduced him to the King of Italy. He said: "Here is my Mussolini." It is on record that the King of Italy did not smile. Later, as the months rolled by, King Alfonso became less and less enamoured of his dictatorship.

From time to time there were small attempts at uprisings in Spain, but the Army and the Civil Guards, particularly the Civil Guards, always managed to crush the rebellions. Nevertheless, students of politics noticed that the troubles were becoming more frequent, and those who knew Spain well learned that there were many signs of trouble which did not always become apparent in the newspapers, particularly in the Spanish newspapers.

King Alfonso decided to get rid of his Dictator. Primo de Rivera had been popular enough in the early years of his dictatorship because he spent large sums of public funds making roads and undertaking other public works which kept people in employment, but the peseta was beginning to fall in value abroad, and the Spaniards themselves began to sell the national currency and to buy pounds and dollars. Immediately there were riots, men and women marched through the streets shouting "Hunger! Bread!" The time came when the King decided to dismiss Primo de Rivera. Just as he made him, so

the King unmade him. He went for a holiday and arranged for the overthrow of the man who had held Spain together for more than six years. The man the King called in to form what was known in Spain as a "Palace Government" was General Berenguer, who was implicated in the North African disasters, and who was afterwards nominated by the King to be the Chief of the Military Cabinet. Here again was another grave blunder. The General had been impeached and for a long time attempts were made to prevent him being brought before the Court. Finally he was brought before the Court, but the case was dismissed.

More than 40 per cent of the population of Spain was entirely illiterate. Those who could read and write demanded that the Spanish Constitution be respected. Article 22 of the Constitution said that within ninety days of the fall of the Government a new one must be set up. The King, it was claimed, violated the Constitution, first by setting up a dictatorship, and secondly by appointing a Government which had never been chosen by the people and had never faced Parliament. The Palace Government chosen by the King consisted, among others, of the King's private lawyer and the Duke d'Alba. The King also depended very much on the support of Dr. Segura, the Archbishop of Toledo.

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

The Archbishop had caused a sensation in Spain by issuing a pastoral letter forbidding Spanish Roman Catholics to join the Republican Party. The Republican Party in Spain at that time was gaining new recruits daily, but nevertheless it was not a strong party, and if it had not become linked later to the Socialists, nothing would have been heard of the Republican Party in Spain to-day. It was the joining up of the two Parties which led to the overthrow of the Monarchy.

While troubles were brewing in other parts of Spain, the situation in Catalonia was becoming worse. The Separatist movement was gathering strength. There was much economic distress in Catalonia, and Barcelona itself was the meeting-place not only of anti-Monarchists, but of Syndicalists, Communists and Anarchists. Barcelona had through the years been the great "centre of international Anarchism," if such a thing there be. Anarchists from Russia and from Germany and from Italy used to meet in Barcelona cafés. How much or how little the King of Spain knew of what was happening in his country, we shall never know. It is possible that the King knew far less of the real situation than was believed possible at the time.

Looking back, one finds that the King meant that his Palace Government should

be a civilian dictatorship with himself in the background, so that he could continue to reign as an absolute monarch. Fresh difficulties, apart from the Separatist movement in Catalonia, were continually cropping up. General Berenguer, who was to have been the titular head of the new Government, had injured his foot and he remained in the War Office, where all the discussions took place. Finally the General decided that he would not be head of the Government, but that he would be Minister of War. The new Prime Minister was Admiral Aznar, an old man, more at home on the quarterdeck than in high politics, but his post was a perfect sinecure. The Mayor of Madrid was made Minister of the Interior.

The real strong man of the Cabinet was Count Romanones, who became Minister of Foreign Affairs, a portfolio he had held during the World War. He was a Liberal, and he was lost in a Government consisting of staunch Tories. During the discussions which lasted until three o'clock in the morning at the War Office, Count Romanones sought to influence his colleagues to ask the King to pardon the political prisoners who had been in jail in Spain for two months without trial. The members of the Cabinet refused, and then the Count went to the King in person, and he met with a point-blank refusal. If at that

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

moment the King had said that he would restore Constitutional Government, all might have been well. The King would have won back at least some of the popularity he had lost. His lack of vision was to prove yet another very grave blunder.

After two days of almost continuous consultations with Ministers and politicians in a desperate effort to save his Throne, King Alfonso drove one day alone to the grim Escorial Monastery and prayed in solitude before the tomb of his mother. The Queen used to warn her son that the continuation of a dictatorship would endanger the Throne. The Queen-mother often advised the King to summon Sanchez Guerra to replace Primo de Rivera and re-establish a Constitutional Government.

Señor Sanchez Guerra was the arch-enemy of the King. He had said: "So long as King Alfonso remains in Spain, I shall never accept office."

Those who had supported the dictatorship—and at the beginning there were hundreds of thousands who did—were quite pleased with the way it had worked. It is perfectly true that Primo de Rivera did bring justice to Spain. Prior to the dictatorship, politicians only had to inform judges how they wanted cases settled, and if the judges refused to comply they were removed to other posts.

Primo de Rivera put an end to that. He appointed a Commission of High Magistrates who appointed the judges. Judges could not be removed from their posts without a real reason. The Clergy, too, had been appointed by the politicians. Count Romanones was referred to satirically in Spain as the "Archbishop of Spain." He had appointed so many of the Clergy. General Primo de Rivera appointed a Commission of Church Officials and Civilians which made all clerical appointments, after they had been approved by the Vatican. Primo de Rivera removed hundreds of journalists from sinecures they enjoyed under previous Governments. He also pitch-forked tens of thousands of Civil Servants out of their jobs, and so created many enemies, but still the majority of the people was glad. Other enemies of the Dictator were the Members of Parliament who lost their salaries of £16 a month; but weighing up the enemies against the friends, Primo de Rivera had many more friends, and it was the cost of living, the ever-rising cost, which really began the unrest leading to his undoing. As I have sought to point out, however, his undoing was hastened by the action of the King, who after he had appointed his Palace Government, looked around for other means to bolster up his Throne.

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

One of the most amazing things the King ever did was suddenly to remember the advice of his mother and to offer the Premiership to Señor Guerra.

Guerra had predicted the overthrow of King Alfonso. He had plotted to set up a Republican Government, although he was a member of the Conservative Party of Spain. The plot failed because a storm prevented Guerra reaching Spain in time. News of the conspiracy leaked out and Guerra was arrested and kept prisoner in a man-o'-war. Eventually he was brought to trial for treason and acquitted.

Although he had affirmed that so long as the King remained in Spain he would never accept office, Guerra did now accept the proposition the King made to him. The British Ambassador told me this time that if the King could weather the storm for another two years, his position would be safe. The King no doubt thought that Señor Sanchez Guerra could help him weather the storm for the next two years.

At ten o'clock one morning, Señor Guerra drove to the Palace and was immediately received by the King. He remained there an hour and a half. Guerra, who had been arrested some two years before, had stuck to his guns throughout the trial. He told the King in perfectly frank and straightforward

language that Spain would not stand any more Dictators, and he would not take part in any General Election such as the late Government proposed to effect. Step by step the King was driven back until he had no more defence to make. Finally he agreed to all the demands Señor Guerra made.

Guerra left the Palace and drove straight to the Model Prison where were all the political prisoners who had been arrested in an attempt at revolution some few months previously. Four days after the King had received his former enemy, His Majesty made the following statement: "He (Guerra) came to me, he wept, he embraced me, he insulted me, and then he went away." The King made this statement to the Duke of Miranda. Guerra at this time was seventy-two years of age. His own version of the encounter was that he told the King: "You don't know the true state of affairs in your own country. The other evening my daughter was at a cinema, one of the most aristocratic cinemas in Madrid, and they were showing the film of Byrd in the Antarctic. The Spanish Ambassador at Washington said a few words in Spanish at the beginning of the film. When he mentioned Your Majesty's name, people began to hiss." It was perfectly true. The film had been hissed so often when the King's

name was mentioned that the part where the Ambassador's speech occurred had to be deleted.

Señor Guerra made a tactical error in going to the prison from the Palace. It made the Monarchists rally round the King and support him, where before many of them had been half-hearted in their defence of the Throne.

I myself, through the help of Señor Alvarez del Vayo, now Minister of Foreign Affairs and who in those days was the Madrid Correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, visited the Model Prison and talked with the members of the shadow Cabinet who had been interviewed by Señor Sanchez Guerra. The regulations governing visits were expected to be revised a few hours after I made my visit. Only the families of the prisoners were supposed to visit them, but the day before I was at the prison no fewer than 12,000 people who were all claiming to be relatives had managed to get into the prison; no wonder then the regulations were to be revised. I was the only foreigner who had ever visited these prisoners.

The Model Prison was a large, double-walled red-brick building. Executions in Spain at that time were by garroting, and the death-chamber, flanked by two death-cells, was close to the chapel. I went to a room on the first floor where there were about eighty men and women all seeking

permits to visit the prisoners. There were old women in rags and young women in fur coats, and priests who had turned Republican. I went into another room where I was given my permit, and then through a steel door into another building and up a wooden staircase into the political department. The political prisoners were in rows of five. One half of the cell was a sort of ante-room where the visitors gathered and talked through iron bars to the prisoners in the cells—chambers about eight feet long by five feet wide and eight feet high. The walls were white-washed and the floor of tessellated stone. I met Professor Fernando de los Rios, who was to be Minister of Justice in the Republican shadow Cabinet. The Professor had friends with plenty of money and his cell was well furnished. It was heated by an electric heater and there was an electric reading-lamp on a table. There was a photograph of the Professor's family on another table next to the enamelled bedstead and there were flowers in a wash-hand basin. In a cell next to the Professor was Alcala Zamora, who became Prime Minister of Spain in the Republican Government. The future Prime Minister's cell was so cold that he had to wear his overcoat. The cell with the most visitors was that of Miguel Maura, who was the son of the

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

leader of the Conservative Party. In a cell next to him was Largo Caballero. All the prisoners were full of the visit they had received from Guerra.

After visiting the prisoners and trying to obtain their help to form a Government, Guerra went to one of the largest theatres in Madrid and made a violent speech attacking the King. King Alfonso and General Berenguer listened in to this speech in the Royal Palace. They had a secret wireless installed.

A strange figure now flits across the Spanish scene. It is Major Franco, a brother of the would-be Dictator of Spain. Major Franco had some reputation as an airman, having once almost flown the Atlantic on a flight personally financed by the King of Spain. Major Franco decided to throw in his lot with the Republicans. According to his story, he planned to bomb the King in his Palace, but when he flew over the Palace he saw many children playing in the gardens next to the Palace and he therefore decided that he would not drop the bombs which he had in his rack, but to put off the attempt until another day. News of his exploit became known in Madrid, and just as he was going to be arrested, Major Franco flew to Portugal and safety. It was there that I saw him and learned his story, which may have been true.

Driven into a corner, King Alfonso agreed to hold Municipal Elections. When the Elections were over, a new Constitution Election was to be held. For nearly seven years there had been no list of electors in Spain. For the purpose of the election the Republicans and the Socialists joined forces. I was present in a small café in which the agreement was made. It turned out to be a most fateful agreement, because it sealed the fate of King Alfonso.

The man instrumental in making the agreement was Alvarez del Vayo, whose story is rather curious. For some years before he returned to his native country, del Vayo was the Berlin Correspondent of a Buenos Aires newspaper. He was appointed Correspondent in Madrid. At that time he had very little interest in the politics of his own country, but he fell foul of the Dictator and was put in prison. When he came out, del Vayo said to me in Madrid: "The next time I go to prison, it will be for a very good reason." It was the dictatorship, or rather the Dictator himself, who made del Vayo a dangerous person for the Monarchy to have as an enemy.

We now come to that fateful Sunday of April when the Elections were held. The Elections, as all know, gave a verdict in favour of the Republicans and the Socialists, yet I am convinced now, as I was then, that the

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

King was in no danger whatsoever. Why, then, did he go? I think the answer must be found in a name: Count Romanones.

A biographer of King Alfonso wrote that the King once said that whatever happened he would "die at his post if necessary." The King did not die at his post. He abandoned his post. It has been written and said that the King left Spain to avoid bloodshed. It was also said that the King left so as to save the life of the Queen and the Royal children. I, who was in Madrid at the time, do not agree. I believe that the King left Spain because Count Romanones advised him to do so. The man who had stood at the very threshold of the King's official life, stood at the door when the King left.

The renunciation of the Throne took place without bloodshed. It was one of the gayest revolutions ever known in history. On the Sunday night and the Monday night there were scenes of high carnival in Madrid. The King, once so popular, certainly the most popular man in the country, was now the most hated. The King left after a scene which may perhaps be best described in the words of Count Romanones: "My conscience is clear, and as a Monarchist of conviction I know I did my duty. I advised the King to go. The story is both very simple and very difficult to relate.

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

On Tuesday at six o'clock there was a King and a Government. At five minutes past six there was neither one nor the other. We went to the Palace to hold a Cabinet meeting. We sat round the table with the King. He was absolutely calm and outwardly unmoved. While we were discussing the Municipal Elections, we could hear from without the Royal Palace the crowds shouting 'Long Live the Republic! Down with the Monarchy!' I said to the King: 'It is inevitable. You must go.' The King put his hands in his pockets and drew out a document which he had himself written out. It was the manifesto you have already read. He had already made up his mind. We saw that discussions were useless. There was nothing to do but accept the inevitable. The King could have obtained the support of about half the Army, but he did not want to divide it. He did not want bloodshed. To the last, he was a King.

"What could we do? Those who had known him for years, his strength, his weakness, his rights and his wrongs, were crying. We went up to him one by one and we kissed him on the cheek. We were sobbing, but he was perfectly calm and he kept on repeating '*Adios, adios.*' The Ministers went away. I remained to the last, because I had to make the arrangements for the departure on Wednes-

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

day of the Queen and the Royal Family. I did not see the King again.

“The King was enormously deceived, enormously, by the events. Right up until Sunday night the King never believed that the Elections would go against him. He had been living so detached from his people. He did not come in contact with his people. He did not know them. The mistakes to which the King referred in his manifesto meant the dictatorship. He learned too late that it is so easy to establish a dictatorship and so difficult to dis-establish one. The experience of Spain to-day should be a severe lesson to all the countries on the question of dictatorship. Spain was lucky. We have a saying in our country that providence is always on the side of Spain, but don't let the other countries think that the end of a dictatorship will pass off so easily elsewhere. Of course it is nonsense to compare such an un-Constitutional Monarchy as the one we had in Spain with other European Monarchies. The Scandinavian Monarchies are Crown Republics, and the English Monarchy is something different again. That Monarchy is as safe as can be. In other places there may be changes. Look at Russia. The end of the Romanofs had to come, and the present régime in Russia probes deeper roots every day, despite having the whole world against it.

The King says he has only gone on a holiday. It is true that he has not abdicated from his own rights, nor has he signed or given away the rights of his heirs, but the Cortes Elections can only confirm the Municipal Elections. It is too early to say what the Monarchists' attitude will be. It must be dictated by common sense.

“The handing over of power to Alcala Zamora was not difficult, not at all. I have known him for twenty-eight years. He is a good fellow. The year the King married I was Minister of the Interior, and after the marriage I accompanied the King on a tour of Spain. I took with me a young secretary. That young secretary is to-day President of Spain. I helped him to become a Member of Parliament. No, there was no difficulty at all in handing over. I have always been a partisan of universal suffrage, and when the vote goes against you, you cannot do anything. Oh dear no. There are more than 200 convents in Madrid and thousands of priests, but nevertheless Madrid gave an overwhelming vote for the Republicans which makes it quite clear that a number of the Clergy voted Republican. The Church likes to be on the side of the winner, but I don't think there will be any trouble between the new Republic and the Church.”

So far as the Church was concerned, Count Romanones was a very bad prophet indeed.

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

Very soon after the Spanish Republic was set up, there were anti-clerical riots all over Spain, and many monasteries and convents were burnt to the ground, and churches were ransacked and pillaged. The attack on the established Church of Spain was a form of revenge, mistaken revenge, but revenge nevertheless. The Church in Spain was all-powerful; education was in the hands of the Church, but the Church did not make any use of its power and it did not educate the people. The Church was rich, very rich indeed. It held valuable properties and it owned the underground railway in Madrid. The majority of the Spanish people were very poor, so the clash between the people and the Church became a class-war. There was the envy of the rich by the poor, much more than any deliberate attack on the Church as the Church. It is important, in the light of later events, that this point should be clearly understood.

We have seen what Count Romanones had to say about the departure of the King. He affirmed that the King went to avoid bloodshed, but once again it is important to stress the fact that Count Romanones, who had been taken back into favour after a period of coolness between himself and his Sovereign, did advise the King to go. There was not any indication that there would be bloodshed, and

if there had been any attempt at street fighting, the *Guardia Civil*, which, at that moment, was wholeheartedly on the side of the King, would soon have restored order.

During the Spanish dictatorship Count Romanones lived mostly in France, in exile. When the Spanish Republic was set up, Count Romanones, a member of the Liberal Party, remained in Spain. He never left Spain until the beginning of the present war. What part Count Romanones intended to play in Spanish politics after the setting up of the Republic is not clear. He was an old man, over seventy, but he was extremely active behind the scenes. Perhaps he intended to be the wire-puller, but events so turned out that any desire on his part to dominate the scene was frustrated. If Count Romanones on that fateful evening in April had said to the King: "I advise Your Majesty to stay for a little while and to await events," then it is, to my mind, most probable that the whole history of Spain would have been different and the Mediterranean to-day would be a quiet sector of the world.

The 1932 revolution in Spain may be compared to the Kerensky revolution in Russia in 1917. The first Spanish revolutionists were soft-hearted people and they certainly did not desire bloodshed; for the most part, members of the Government were literary men. Perhaps

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

it was a very great mistake to appoint them to such high office. They had no experience of governing and they were revolutionists in theory only. Like most men of their mental calibre, they were not fit to govern.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs in the first Republican Government was Alexander Lerroux, a strange adventurer who had tried everything once. For a great many years Lerroux had been a Republican, but he was on intimate terms with the King. No sooner was Lerroux a member of the Government than he commenced a vast intrigue which might have meant the return of the King, who, it will be recalled, said he had gone on holiday. Lerroux broke away from the Socialists and began to intrigue with the Catholic Party. Gradually the Catholic Party in Spain became stronger, and the so-called Action Populaire, at the head of which was Gil Robles, became for a time the apparent link between the exiled Monarch and his vacant Throne. It was this reactionary movement which led to the most serious revolt against the Republic, but there were other attempted efforts to seize power by members of the Extreme Left.

Spain was suffering from hysteria at this time. The Banks were guarded by soldiers; the street corners were held by the military; and there were many tanks on view. Martial

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

Law was in force. Major Ramón Franco began an intrigue. He flirted with the Russian Communist Party, but at that time there were not more than a hundred Communists in the whole of Spain. The real makers of trouble were the Syndicalists, who detested the Communists. When the King left Spain without appealing to the Civil Guard, the Civil Guard was hurt in its dignity. The King's agents in Spain made a serious mistake when they pressed for the dissolution of the Civil Guard, giving as a reason that the Civil Guard had not defended the Monarchy. This was a grave mistake, because the Civil Guard was the real bulwark against Anarchy.

There was also trouble at this time in three ships in the Navy. High naval officers, although they took the oath of allegiance to the Republic, were undoubtedly Royalists at heart. The official cheers in a Spanish ship-of-war before the Revolution were: "Long live Spain! Long live the King!" The Republican Government changed this to "Long live Spain! Long live the Republic!" In one ship at Cadiz Harbour, the Captain gave the signal for the cheer "Long live Spain!" but did not give the signal for the Republican cheer. A boatswain stepped forward, saluted, and told the Captain a mistake had been made and the Republican cheer forgotten. The Captain

told the boatswain to return to the ranks. He refused and the officer put a revolver to his chest, and told the man to break rank. The boatswain then said: "Kill me if you like, but the cry is 'Long live the Republic!'" The whole crew took up the cry "Long live the Republic!" The petty officers held a meeting and sent a delegation to the Captain and stated that unless the second cheer was restored, the officers would be flung overboard. Ten minutes later the Captain and the officers involved in the quarrel went ashore and took train for Madrid.

There was undoubtedly a change of heart towards the Republic. It was losing ground. I was in Spain again a month after the King left. There were now very few Republican flags to be seen. Only the official buildings were flying them. On the other hand, feeling against the Church was rising. Dr. Segura, the Archbishop of Toledo, had remained behind, but because of the rising feeling he left Toledo and went into hiding, and later crossed over the French frontier to Hendaye.

The Basques began to threaten war against the Government of Madrid, and loud rumblings of the storm were to be heard in Navarre. When the time came to hold the first Elections under the Republic, Major Ramón Franco was dismissed from his post as Chief of the Spanish Air Force because of allegations of

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

counter-revolutionary activities. It was reported that Major Franco had intended to lead a counter-revolt against the Government and that he was trying to secure the support of the Air Force.

Civil war then broke out in Catalonia. It lasted for four days. The "revolutionaries" dug trenches and obtained the use of two warships. This attempt at revolution was smashed by the Anarchists under Señor Anguera del Sojo, the Civil Governor. The Governor was a tiny little man, not more than five feet in height. He spoke with a very pronounced stammer. There was much rivalry between the Governor and Colonel Macia, who was an old man and the leader of the Separatist movement in Catalonia. The Anarchists, after the revolution was smashed, pressed for the resignation of the Governor and accused him of having been personally responsible for the bloodshed. Señor del Sojo accused the Monarchists of having been responsible for the Revolution, because when there was a King in Spain, the Monarchists never did anything, so he said, to try and smash the Anarchist movement; but the Catalonia Government only took action when the Anarchists themselves took action. Sojo claimed that the Anarchist movement was smashed for ever, but he was entirely wrong. On the contrary it was growing rapidly. A bewildering revolution.

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

There were very sound reasons for discontent. The new Republic had not made good. In the neighbourhood of Seville, conditions were truly shocking. Here, surrounded by scenery wild, mountainous and beautiful, were found living about ten thousand men, women and children in conditions such as could not have been equalled anywhere in Europe. These Andalusian peasants were the disinherited of the earth. They had neither clothes, food nor homes. The Government, in a state of despair, instituted a form of "Dole" and seized the Civil List of the ex-Royal Family and used it to help the outcasts, but the money was so small that it had practically no effect whatsoever.

The people, the population of a small town, were destitute of everything and were living in burrows like foxes. The hillsides of Seville, which was once a great Royalist city, were honeycombed with holes in the sunbaked soil where the population lived after a fashion all its own. For drink they crawled, dragging weary limbs, to a small river and scooped up the water with their hands; for food they gnawed roots and ate grass like the animals they resembled, and all this beneath a perfect blue sky and an unclouded sun which shone day after day with ever-increasing heat. The people lay in the sun and waited for death or

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

for the coming of Pedro Vallina, who made himself the champion of these outcasts.

Vallina was an Anarchist who, after having been expelled from Spain, went to live in London, where he became well known in Anarchist centres in Soho. He took his Medical Degree in London and when, in 1915, he was pardoned, he returned to Spain. Major Ramón Franco and Vallina came together and both tried to help these outcast peasants. Vallina demanded that land should be given to them. Franco, a visionary in an aeroplane, said that he wanted to help the people, but his only ideas were of such a revolutionary nature that they shocked his partner, Vallina. Major Franco advocated bombing the Banks.

Troubles were now besetting the Spanish Republic from all sides. The Right was intriguing and the Left was ready to fight; it had fought and it had lost, but it was ready to fight again. It is undoubtedly true that at this time Russia took a very sinister interest in Spain, but there was very little likelihood of Russia, even with money, being able to set up a Soviet Republic; nevertheless, the intrusion of Russia was a Heaven-sent opportunity. It was the opportunity for which both the Germans and the Italians had been looking.

Germany had already made two attempts to establish herself in the Mediterranean. There

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

may even have been three attempts, although one of them was a very feeble one. The first, which centred at Agadir, I refer to in another chapter. The second was made during the World War when German submarine bases were established in Spain. The third the least successful, was the attempt to intrigue in Spanish Morocco and to try and make trouble both for the French and the Spaniards. The fourth, the present attempt, is the most audacious ever made. It is a pity that those who accept the fact that Russia intervened in Spain in the beginning, refuse to accept the overwhelming evidence that Italy and Germany intervened in Spain, not with money and leaflets, but with men, munitions and aeroplanes. Yet all this is undoubtedly true. It is hypocritical to talk of "volunteers" fighting in Spain. The only real volunteers in Spain are those who were members of the International Brigade fighting for the Spanish Government. They were real volunteers, real in every sense of the word. They mostly went to Spain to fight and die for ideals, not for money, and most certainly not for the glory of any country. Members of the International Brigade did not go to Spain in uniforms or equipped with rifles or bayonets. I have seen many of them go. They crossed over to France by the cheapest route, they only had a few shillings

in their pockets. They were given third-class fares to travel across France to Spain. When they reached Spain, there were often enough no rifles for them, and certainly no uniforms. Many members of the International Brigade are members of the Communist Parties of various countries, but by no means all of them; many members of the Brigade are anti-Fascists from Italy, and there are anti-Fascists from Poland. There are also Frenchmen who are members of the French Communist Party, and members of the British Communist Party were fighting there also.

Since Mussolini admitted that he has been sending troops to Spain, there seems no reason at all even to mention the fact that there has been intervention both from Rome and from Berlin. It is curious that the Non-Intervention Committee has no official knowledge, even now, of this admitted intervention.

There was published in London in the summer of 1938 a collection of documents and records under the title: "Foreign Intervention in Spain." Many of the documents included in this book were discovered in various Madrid Embassies. The volume consists of 750 pages. It deals not only with the details of the German intervention and the Italian intervention, but also with the Portuguese intervention. This intervention, at the beginning, was the most important.

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

The movement against the Republic began in Morocco under the leadership of General Sanjuro in August 1932. It was crushed just as most attempts at insurrection in Spain are crushed. Then General Francisco Franco, brother to the late Major Ramón Franco, was approached by Rome, and he accepted the propositions made him. Moors were recruited and shipped across the Mediterranean to fight in the country their ancestors had invaded. Priests met the Moors as they landed and gave them charms which they were told would keep away the bullets.

The Moors alone could not accomplish the task. The war in Spain began on July 17th, 1936, but less than a fortnight later the whole world knew that other countries had intervened. The other countries were, of course, Italy and Germany. "Pertinax," who is well known as a writer with strong Conservative views and is by no means friendly towards the Left, wrote in the *Fortnightly Review*: "It is too easily forgotten that on July 28th (1936) four Caproni aeroplanes staffed with officers and non-commissioned officers of the Italian Army, had the bad luck to land or to be wrecked on the wrong side of the border between Algeria and Spanish Morocco. M. Payroutan, the High Commissioner in Rabat, personally cross-examined the men whose names and military

ranks were indicated on military papers found on board.

“They all declared they had been recruited from various units of the Italian air forces at the beginning of July and had received their final instructions on the 15th, that is three days before the outbreak of hostilities.

“As early as March of the same year, the French Ambassador in Berlin had informed his Government that General Sanjuro who would have been the leader of the revolt but for the accident that cost him his life, had reported himself in Berlin and had been received with welcome in official quarters.”

The whole world—and particularly Italy—was surprised at the resistance of the Spanish people—the peasant and the man in the street. Nobody had ever thought the Spaniards were great fighters, but Spain will go on fighting as long as there is a true Spaniard left above ground; that much is clear.

Although the rising against the Government was carefully planned to meet with rapid success, its leaders as well as its backers were bitterly disappointed. One great factor that told against the Government was that the insurgents had managed to deprive the Madrid Government of the majority of its trained troops, and the Government had to raise an amateur army to fight. Approxi-

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

mately one-third of the whole country declared itself in favour of the Fascists under General Franco. For two years the battle raged with varying fortune. At one moment it looked as if Madrid must fall, and it is on record that the correspondent of a London newspaper with a strong leaning towards Fascism actually wrote a despatch declaring himself to be in Madrid with Franco's men. In an earlier despatch he said Franco's men were "within 200 yards of the Puerta del Sol, the Piccadilly Circus of Madrid."

Franco's men were never as near as that, and it is to be hoped that this war correspondent has now returned to easier tasks, but Franco's men were very near entering Madrid, and when Franco found that the taking of Madrid was so difficult, and after he had battered it almost into ruin, he issued a proclamation to the effect that he did not need to take it. Nevertheless, inch by inch, the territory of Spain has fallen into the hands of the men with the bigger battalions. Spain became a trying-out ground for the new weapons of war; new aeroplanes, new types of tanks, new guns, they were all tried out by the two Fascist powers of Europe. The men of Spain stood up against all these weapons, not often with military success, but always with great courage. If there had been no

foreign intervention, what would have happened?

Left to themselves, it is fairly evident that the Fascists, the Socialists and the Republicans would have arrived at a state of stalemate, and then an armistice could have been arranged and peace would have ended the real civil war. In April 1937, when the war in Spain had been in progress for nine months, a five-power Non-Intervention Agreement came into force. Then later, another agreement against piracy in the Mediterranean was made. This agreement came into force fourteen months after the war broke out. Acts of piracy in the Mediterranean were supposed to have been committed by "unknown submarines." There are very few people in the world who do not know the identity of these "unknown" pirates. Later, official communiqués were published mentioning "unknown aeroplanes." Here again was another act of hypocrisy. The 'planes were clearly identified.

It is claimed that the Committee of Non-Intervention prevented the war in Spain from spreading elsewhere; these words are written while the war is still raging in Spain, and it is still a potential danger to the world.

The main object of this chapter is to show the effect that the war in Spain is having

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

in the Mediterranean. But the writer also wishes to try and show that the war in Spain has roots which go very far back, certainly deeper in the Spanish soil than many people realise. It is human to make mistakes, but the mistakes made by King Alfonso and Count Romanones have certainly mattered very much in the present evolution of the Spanish situation.

If the Spanish Government emerges as a victor from the present conflict, what will happen? It is to be presumed that the country will carry on as it did before it was invaded, but unless foreign assistance is available, Spain will drift further and further back. That much may be said by any impartial observer.

If General Franco, to name him as the titular head of the insurgents, wins, what will happen? All the world fears that if Franco wins, Italian and German bases will be established in Spain. It is true that Franco has averred that not an inch of Spanish territory will come under foreign domination, but will Franco have the last word in this matter? Will Italy withdraw from the Balearic Islands, so necessary to her control of the Mediterranean? Will the Germans abandon the guns they have mounted on the Spanish side of the frontier which divides the country from France? That is still another grave question.

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

At the time of writing, General Franco's German and Italian soldiers have conquered more than two-thirds of Spain. About 13,000,000 people live in those territories. That is to say, slightly more than half of the total population of Spain. Franco never had more than 100,000 men of Spanish birth under his command, but he has managed to increase his armies by 40,000 Italians, to put the figure at the lowest ever mentioned by responsible authorities, and by 80,000 Moors. There are also about 10,000 German airmen and mechanics with Franco. Of these 10,000 Germans, 6,000 belong to the Condor Legion, which consists of pilots, anti-aircraft gunners and lorry drivers, also technicians who are experts in field telegraph and telephone communications.

There is continuous speculation as to the eventual form of Government in Spain, should Franco prove the victor. There is no clear evidence that the Monarchy will be restored, but most certainly King Alfonso himself will never be able to return to the Throne, and this, despite the fact that he has sunk an immense part of his not inconsiderable fortune in the insurgent movement in Spain. It is often asked how Franco manages to finance his long-drawn-out conflict. In the beginning, Italy gave a certain amount of

—[*The Rape of Spain*]—

money and provided men and munitions without making any cash charge. In the last few months, Franco has been collecting not inconsiderable revenues from the population which lives in the territory he controls.¹

There are obvious reasons for believing that both Germany and Italy have been counting on obtaining favourable treatment from both Spain and Portugal when war is over. Yet the Spaniards have become nationally conscious since the war has cost them so much. It is difficult to believe that if Franco or his advisers were in favour of granting concessions of an important nature to foreign countries, he or they could remain in Spain; they would be driven out by the Spaniards who have fought under Franco, as well as the Spaniards who have fought so bitterly against him. So long as the war in Spain lasts—and in the opinion of this writer it may easily last for another eighteen months, or even two years—the situation in the Mediterranean can never become stabilised; and so long as it remains in a state of flux, so long will there be great danger to the peace of the world.

¹ In addition, Juan March, to whom a more extensive reference is made on pages 105-107, is alleged to have financed Franco to a very large extent.

★ III ★

East End

I

LET us cross the Mediterranean from west to east and see what the situation is to-day in that part of the world. The Adriatic Sea is just a backwater of the Mediterranean; so is the Aegean Sea, and the Black Sea and the Red Sea are also backwaters which are reached through narrow straits; one through the Dardanelles, and the other through the Suez Canal. So far as the Adriatic Sea is concerned, Italy has a slightly longer coast-line than her opposite number, Yugo-Slavia. At the southern end of Yugo-Slavia there is Albania and the west coast of Greece. Italy controls the northern end of the Adriatic, as well as the west coast, and as the Sea narrows where the heel of Italy juts out into the Adriatic, Italy has a good opportunity of closing the Adriatic Sea if ever she wishes to do so. Albania is a vassal

state of Italy, and neither the Yugo-Slav Navy nor the Greek Navy are very strong. Yugo-Slavia has built a few torpedo-boat destroyers in England to guard her coast, but, nevertheless, potentially, the Yugo-Slav coast could be used for submarine bases, and this would reduce the strength of Italy very considerably.

Albania is a Moslem country, and as Mussolini has assumed the mantle of the protector of Islam, it has given him an even greater personal standing in Albania than he had at the time that Italy and Albania reached an agreement which placed the smaller country in the pocket of the larger. Despite the defensive works which Italian engineers built along the Greek and Yugo-Slav frontiers of Albania, there remains always the danger from hostile submarines. Under the present working arrangement between Italy and Albania, the Italian Navy can use the Albanian ports for her own submarines, and as she has the largest Navy of any of the states in the eastern part of the Mediterranean, she can easily overcome any threat of danger from either Greece or Yugo-Slavia, or both those nations combined. Albania is almost a day's journey from the port of Bari, but the sea can be spanned in a little more than an hour through the air. In 1938 Italy began to obtain petrol from the

Albanian wells in fairly important quantities, but Mussolini has yet another reason for wishing to control Albania, or rather to retain the control of Albania and to prevent that little country being invaded by some other Balkan nation. There are roughly 3,000,000 Moslems living in Yugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Greece and Albania, apart from the millions further east: in Turkey, in Syria and in Palestine.

In the early post-war years Yugo-Slav agents intrigued in Albania against the Italians. The Italians retaliated by intriguing in Dalmatia against the Yugo-Slavs, and they provided rifles and uniforms for an uprising which was nipped in the bud by the Yugo-Slavs. From time to time—and as recently as 1935—the Albanian Government did try to free itself from the Italian yoke, but all attempts were in vain, and for the past three years the country has been quiet. Italy has subdued her vassal state.

For the past three years relations between Rome and Belgrade have been more friendly. During the reign of the late King Alexander there was considerable friction, and it is a fact that quite a part of this friction was inspired from Paris. From time to time, attempts are made both in Rome and in Berlin to make relations between the

Yugo-Slav capital and the German and Italian capitals even more friendly than they are, but Paris also works hard to keep them from becoming more friendly. Yugo-Slavia, because of her long coast-line on the Adriatic, must always figure as a pawn in the game of chess which is being played in the Mediterranean.

The Balkan Pact made Greece and Turkey allies. There is semi-dictatorship in Greece, but the King who was restored to the Throne after many years of exile spent in Great Britain, is thoroughly pro-English, and since the Italian War in Abyssinia, Greece has not only entered the British fold in the Mediterranean, but shows every sign of wishing to stay there. The fact that Greece is, officially at least, pro-British and therefore pro-French is of no little importance to the cause of peace, because the Greek islands provide very many submarine bases in the eastern Mediterranean.

Events in the western Mediterranean rather hid from public view the important events which occurred in the eastern section in the summer of 1938. The map shows that very close to the British island of Cyprus is a tiny slice of territory between Turkey and Syria. This territory, the Sanjak of Alexandretta, was under a French mandate. The population of the territory numbers roughly a quarter of a million, and they are Turks and Armenians,

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

Syrians, Kurds and Greeks. The League of Nations sent a Commission to Alexandretta to try and arrange an election. An autonomous Government was to be elected by this mixed populace, but it looked as if trouble might result. France and Turkey, then opened direct negotiations. The result was the Franco-Turkish Agreement of July 1938 stipulated that, until the new Constitution of the Sanjak was in normal working order, the country should be garrisoned by 2,500 French and 2,500 Turkish troops. Responsibility for the maintenance of order was left in the hands of the French, and the highest rank among the Turkish troops was that of colonel—the French had a general. It was as a result of this agreement that, on July 5th, the Turks entered the Sanjak. In June 1938 London lent Mustapha Kemal's Government £6,000,000 for the purchase of war materials. And in the previous May, the U.K. had granted Turkey an export credit of £10,000,000. There is not the slightest doubt, I think, that Paris and London worked in unity to check-mate Italy in the eastern Mediterranean. Turkey arranged to spend a good part of the loan in England, to build warships.

In 1916 it was agreed that France should have Syria, but three years later Great Britain changed her mind. It had been found that

there were huge and valuable deposits of oil in the Syrian province of Mosul. France had received a mandate over Syria, which will expire this year. Mr. Lloyd George had insisted, during the Peace negotiations, that Alexandretta, because of its large Turkish population, was to be accorded a separate administration.

The importance of having Turkey as a friend in the Mediterranean lies in the fact that the great oil pipe line runs from Mosul through Syria to the port of Tripoli, in Syria, and another line runs through Palestine to Haifa. London and Paris must be certain that Turkey is friendly, otherwise Syria might be annexed by Turkey and the oil supplies for the French and British Navies in the eastern Mediterranean would be cut off. Alexandretta, in the hands of France or any other country, meant control of an important gateway to the Arab world in the hinterland of the eastern Mediterranean. It would be interesting to know what secret clauses, if any, there are in the Treaty that M. Georges Bonnet, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, made in the summer of 1938 with the late Mustapha Kemal when the eyes of the world were fastened on the western Mediterranean.

The pan-Arab movement, sponsored by Italy, is largely responsible for the tension in

Palestine. It is true that Great Britain made promises to the Jewish and Arab worlds, promises which could not possibly be fulfilled, because one promise cancelled out the other. Yet it must be remembered that tension only grew serious after many years of the arrangement working better than it might have done. Palestine had been a Moslem country for 700 years. It may be said with some truth that tension between the Jews and Arabs did not grow until the number of Jews who went to Palestine increased very greatly, but this increase was due mostly to the political situation in Europe. Germany began to ill-treat and persecute her Jewish subjects, and that very naturally increased the desire for a trek towards Palestine. In other countries, like Rumania and Poland, there was also persecution, and Jews left yet more countries for fear of persecution. The idea of creating a Jewish national home was a splendid piece of war-time propaganda, but did this suggestion not mean a Jewish home encrusted within an Arab country?

Yet to-day there is one important fact which is often overlooked: Great Britain must, and will, remain in Palestine herself whatever happens; her vital interests compel her to do so.

The southern section of Palestine is vital to British interests because of the Suez Canal.

Britain must remain there if she is to retain control of the Suez Canal, but this control lapses in thirty years. If Britain cannot have control at the end of thirty years, she will most undoubtedly build another canal which will spring from the eastern Mediterranean through south Palestine into the Red Sea.

It is, however, likely that within the next thirty years, and perhaps long before the Suez Canal lease lapses, the situation in the Mediterranean will have been settled for generations. The rule of terror in Palestine depends on agitation, money, and the supply of arms. The Arab allegations that the Jews are driving them out of Palestine are not based on substantial facts. The Jews are not given land: they buy land, and they buy land from the Arabs. The Arabs sell them land at high prices and wax fat thereon. British rule in Palestine plus the Jewish immigration has made Palestine one of the most prosperous countries in the world to-day, and because it has become prosperous it has attracted settlers from neighbouring Arab countries where economic conditions are not so flourishing. The population, the Arab population, in Palestine has increased since the British have ruled there. The increase is due both to a lower death-rate caused by better sanitation, and also to immigration.

In French chauvinistic circles, Great Britain is accused of having violated her mandate over Palestine. Great Britain is accused of having turned Palestine into a great arsenal. Another accusation is that Haifa has been made into a "military port" which will be one of the most powerful in the world. The fact that France is withdrawing from Syria, just as Great Britain withdrew from Iraq, after giving notice of the expiration of her mandate, has caused a certain amount of confusion in the minds of foreign students of British foreign policy. If the United States had accepted the Armenian mandate, the whole question of the balance of power in the Mediterranean would not have arisen, or at least not in such an acute form as it has done within the past three years. If it were possible to reach a peaceful settlement with Italy, it is difficult to see why there should be any objection to Great Britain remaining in Palestine, as she is doing at the present time, as a mandatory power. Nevertheless, I think it would be much better if the situation was clarified, and if the British Government made it known that her vital interest, not only in connection with the Suez Canal, but in connection with India and with Australia, make it necessary for her to stay in Palestine. Naturally, I am looking some way ahead; I am

looking towards the time when tension in Palestine will be eased and when Jews and Arabs will finally decide that they can live within the same framework in a peaceful manner. Until then, it will be necessary to keep a strong British force in Palestine, whether Italy likes it or not.

Apart from the supply of Italian money and German-manufactured arms to the Arabs in Palestine, Italy has been rendering a bad service to the peace of the world by using the ether as a means to attack Great Britain in Palestine. The poisonous propaganda poured out from the wireless station at Bari has caused the deaths of many people in Palestine. On the other hand, it cannot be said to have done any particular good to the Italian cause in the Near East. As a result of the tentative agreement reached in 1938 between London and Rome, an agreement which is dependent on the settlement of the war in Spain, anti-British propaganda from the Bari station ceased for some months, but towards the end of August 1938 there were signs that it was all beginning again.

No picture of the eastern Mediterranean would be complete unless it contained a view of the situation in the Arab world which borders on the Mediterranean. Some time before the French Government decided

to withdraw from the Syrian mandate, there was a question of setting up an independent Government under French suzerainty. There were several applicants for the Throne of Syria. Finally it was decided that there should be a form of Republican Government. Minor Egyptian Princes' names were put forward as suitable Kings of Syria, and at one time the name of the Aga Khan was mentioned as a candidate.

The Aga Khan is just as much pro-French as he is pro-British. He spends more of his time in France than he does in England, much more.

The Aga Khan had been in negotiation with the British Government through the India Office to obtain some territories over which he could rule as a temporal Prince; at present he is the spiritual head of about 40,000,000 Moslems, but apart from an estate in the South of France, which consists of a house with a large garden, and several palaces in India and a stud farm in Ireland, he has no "territory" whatsoever. Perhaps the suggestion that the Aga Khan should become King of Syria did not come from the Aga Khan himself, but there were certain suggestions, and soundings were taken in London. Apparently the British Government did not care very much about the idea. In any case,

the matter was dropped. I asked the Aga Khan myself in London what the truth was concerning the questions which had been asked in the House of Commons *à propos* of his desire to become the head of an Indian state. The Aga Khan answered that perhaps one day the British Government would realise the services his family had rendered to Great Britain.

* * * * *

On the very edge of the northern shore of the Dardanelles is a poignant memory of the last disastrous conflict in which the British Empire took part in the Mediterranean. There looms out of the Mediterranean mist as a steamer enters or leaves the Dardanelles, a granite obelisk pointing a grey finger to the heavens; it is the British memorial dedicated to the men who stayed behind buried in Turkish soil when the Allied Expeditionary Force evacuated the Dardanelles after a long and unsuccessful attempt to take Constantinople. The dead hands of ghosts pluck at the sleeves of the living as they pass that way; memories live on.

The Golden Horn has been robbed of much of its splendour since the capital of Turkey was removed to the interior of the Anatolian Desert, but although Constantinople to-day is not much more than a mirror of past

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

splendours, it is still a symbol of a once great Empire, which stretched from Asia into Europe as well as into Africa.

Behind Constantinople, the Bosphorus leads into that strange backwater of the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, where Russia possesses the port of Odessa, Rumania the port of Constanza, and Bulgaria the port of Varna. To-day the Russian Fleet is just a note of interrogation; Rumania and Bulgaria possess Navies which are nebulous, but the green hills of the Bosphorus, with their derelict villas of Turkish beys long since dead, may yet one day be a narrow pathway leading fleets of men-o'-war into the eastern part of the Mediterranean.

The war in Spain hid yet another important change in the eastern side of the Mediterranean. The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty did not receive the public notice it deserved. Egypt has grown up; it has become a Member of the League of Nations, which in itself may not be important, but it is a mark of progress in Egyptian affairs.

Once upon a time the Egyptian Government insisted that it was perfectly capable of taking care of itself. It feared no aggressor. Then Italy suddenly appeared on the fringe of the Soudan, and Egypt was scared. The Italians are now on two sides of the Soudan. On the

east and on the west, there are Italian armies. The French are on the west, as well as the Italians, but Egypt does not fear aggression from France. For years, many British statesmen have sought an understanding with Egypt; various concessions were offered to Cairo, but Cairo turned them down. Now Mussolini has obtained what a long line of British statesmen never were able to obtain: a close working agreement between Great Britain and Egypt. That means that the Suez Canal will be defended, perhaps as never before.

Since the Italians have practical control over Lake Tsana they can dam the headwaters of the Blue Nile. Then Egypt will starve. There will be no cotton, and cotton is the lifeblood of Egypt. Nevertheless, even if Egypt starves, the Suez Canal must be kept open for traffic between Australia, the Malay States, India and other points west, and Europe. Not even intensified air traffic could diminish the importance of the Suez Canal as a link between Great Britain and the eastern section of the British Empire. Many well-informed persons stress the fact that for many reasons the Cape of Good Hope route is superior to the Suez Canal route, but that is a moot point. Most certainly, in the case of a European conflict in which Great Britain is involved, the Cape of

Good Hope route must play an important part, but there are good reasons for believing that the Cape of Good Hope route will always be a secondary route.

The new Anglo-Egyptian Treaty made certain important changes in the defence of the Suez Canal. Although the Canal was successfully defended during the World War, military experts believe that it would be better, and easier, to defend the Canal from the southern part of Palestine, rather than from the banks of the Canal itself. In another World War, aviation will play a much bigger part in the defence of the Canal than it did in the last World War, when only a few 'planes were ever used. For this purpose, the headquarters of the Royal Air Force in the Canal section is being removed from Ismailia to Geneffa which is further to the south east. The reason why the aerial base has been removed to this section is because it is anticipated that any attack on the Canal will not come, as in the World War, from the Turks, but from the Italians. The lease of the Suez Canal expires on November 17th, 1968. Before that date, the Egyptian Government will have either to renew the present concession; grant another concession, or take over the administration of the Canal itself. If the Egyptian Government should decide to grant

a new concession, it by no means follows that this concession would be granted to the present Company, which has its headquarters in Paris. Although the lease has another thirty years to run, the question of the renewal of the lease is frequently discussed both in foreign newspapers and by the Board of the Suez Canal when it meets in Paris.

The late Sir John Davies, who died in March 1938, and who was one of the three representatives of the British Government on the council of the Suez Canal Company, often discussed this matter with the present writer. Sir John was of the opinion that the Egyptian Government would decide to exploit the Canal itself. According to the terms of the present lease, if the Egyptian Government should adopt the line of action which Sir John Davies foresaw, then it would have to purchase certain buildings and docks which the Company has built in the vicinity of the Suez Canal. A price would have to be agreed, possibly by arbitration. Sir John, who had a good working knowledge of Egypt, thought that the Egyptian Government would not be able to run the Canal successfully, and after an attempt to manage its affairs, it would ask the British Government to take over the concession.

There are thirty-two administrators of the Suez Canal. Ten are British; and of these,

three are nominated by the British Foreign Office, and seven by British shipping interests, but it does not follow that the British nominees are accepted by the Board, although in practice it does work out that the nominations are accepted.

I do not know whether Sir John's opinion was shared by the majority of his colleagues on the Board, but the writer does know for a fact that soundings have been taken in Cairo as to the possibility of the Egyptian Government taking over the management of the Suez Canal when the lease expires.

These exchanges of views have taken place on many occasions, but the Company, or rather its representatives on the spot, have never received what they consider to be satisfactory replies from the Egyptian Government. At one time it was thought that possibly Rome was behind the evasive manner in which the Egyptian Government treated the question of the renewal of the lease. There is no solid ground, however, for accepting this suggestion. It is, moreover, quite in accordance with the Oriental methods of negotiation to delay reply and to take as long as possible over a discussion.

During the war in Abyssinia the question of the Canal loomed in the public press almost daily. There were many speeches made about

the possibility or the advisability of closing the Canal. It should be noted in connection with this idea that it is very plainly on record that the Canal cannot be closed in time of war. The question of closing the Suez Canal was first mentioned in the House of Commons in June 1935. When Ferdinand de Lesseps drafted the Convention of the Suez Canal he caused to be inserted in the first article of this Convention the following statement: "The Suez Maritime Canal shall always be free and open in time of war as in time of peace to all war vessels without flag discriminations.

"Consequently, the High Contracting Parties agree in no way to prevent the free use of the Canal in time of war as in time of peace.

"The Canal shall never be used for the exercise of the right of blockade."

Despite this perfectly clear statement, there were constant references to the advisability or even the legal possibility of the Suez Canal being closed to all war traffic coming from Italy and passing into the Red Sea on its way to Abyssinia. It was suggested time and time again that the League of Nations had the power to close the Suez Canal if it wished to do so. That suggestion stands on no solid ground whatsoever. The country which has the strongest Navy, or the group of nations which have the strongest Navies, can decide to close

the Suez Canal or to keep it open. There is no other tribunal to which appeal may be made.

A decisive sea battle in the Mediterranean would immediately seal the fate of the Suez Canal. If the forces which decided that the Canal should be open were to be defeated by the forces of the nations who wished to close it, then the Suez Canal would be closed and would stay closed so long as the Navies of the stronger force were in possession. The first article of the Convention means nothing in the practical sense, but a lot in a moral sense. For the forces which moved for sanctions at Geneva to have gone still further, and have closed the Suez Canal to Italian traffic, would have meant war on a big scale; of that there can be no possible doubt whatsoever.

Italy is extremely jealous, and perhaps rightly so, of the fact that there is no Italian Director among the thirty-two members of the Board of the Suez Canal Company. In April 1938, when a new Italian-British agreement was under discussion, there were suggestions thrown out that an Italian might be appointed to the Board. Officially at least, there is no record of such a request coming from Rome, and nothing has been done to appoint an Italian. It might appease the wrath of Mussolini if an Italian member were appointed to the Board, but such an appoint-

ment would be nothing more than a polite gesture; it would have no practical effect. The staff of the headquarters of the Suez Canal Company in Paris is wholly French; so is the staff in Egypt. Yet the real control of the Suez Canal is in Whitehall, London.

When Sir John Davies died and the British Foreign Office nominated Sir Maurice Hankey to the vacant place, there were stories in various newspapers that Sir Maurice Hankey had been appointed. Immediately the Secretariat of the Suez Canal Company in Paris gave out an official *communiqué* to the French Press to the effect that Sir Maurice had been “nominated” and that this did not mean that he was going to be appointed. When the Board ratified the appointment, there was no statement of any kind whatsoever in the French Press.

It is only in times of trouble and stress that the business of the Suez Canal reaches the front pages of the newspapers, but when the Board meets in Paris on the first Monday of every month, there are discussions, sometimes unofficial discussions, which reflect as in a very bright mirror what is happening in the Mediterranean. During the war in Abyssinia, the question of the closing of the Suez Canal was never once discussed at a Board meeting in Paris. The question does not appear on any agenda of any meeting which was held during

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

the Abyssinian War. This does not prove that the Directors of the Suez Canal Company were not interested in the question. It rather goes to show that they were not themselves able to take such a vital decision. Maybe there were many members who wished that the Canal should be kept open, and perhaps there was a majority who desired that the Canal should be closed. There is nothing to prove which side had a majority on the Board. There were speeches, violent speeches, demanding that the Canal should be closed, but these speeches were not made in the Board Room of the Suez Canal Company. The question was broached again and again in the House of Commons, both before the Italians launched their offensive and after, yet the eastern end of the Mediterranean remained open, because London had decided that it should be so.

★ IV ★

The Unholy Roman Empire

I

ONE April day in Rome in 1926, a Miss Violet Gibson fired a shot point-blank at Signor Mussolini, who was struck by a bullet in the fleshy part of his nose. He was rushed to hospital while the newspapers sold in thousands. Mussolini was not hurt, but he dramatised that attempt on his life in magnificent fashion. That night he appeared on the balcony of the Palacio Chiggi, and addressing the milling thousands below, he said: "If I advance, follow me; if I retreat, kill me; if I die, avenge me." The next morning he sailed from the port of Ostia, on the West coast of Italy, a few miles from Rome, to pay his first visit to Italian North Africa, when, I claim, he laid the foundation-stone of the second Roman Empire.

Mussolini sailed in the battleship *Cavour*,

and I sailed in an accompanying cruiser, the *Giulio Caesar*.

We were two days at sea. By special permission, I was allowed to use the cruiser's wireless to send messages to London. Since that trip, the *Giulio Caesar* has been transformed into a modern cruiser, but when we sailed in April 1926 she was in a very lamentable condition. The ship was filthy dirty. So were the crew. The officers were a fine crowd of men. In mess they talked very frankly about Mussolini. They regarded him quite candidly as an upstart. They were heart and soul for the King.

Mussolini embarked on this trip wearing the grey-green tunic of a corporal in the Italian Army. On his head he wore a forage cap, and across his nose was a large piece of pink sticking-plaster. The Governor of Tripoli in Tripolitania had prepared a very magnificent welcome for the Dictator. The route from the harbour to the Governor's house was lined with the cheering populace of the town. There were Italians, Arabs, Greeks, Turks, Armenians, and Jews, all cheering frantically and singing songs in their own languages. Mussolini was dressed in the same way as when he left Italy, but in his forage cap he had stuck a white feather. Across his nose was still a piece of pink sticking-plaster. He rode a white horse.

Mussolini rose at dawn every day and was all over the place; he enquired about the crops, and he enquired about the roads; he went up ladders into lofts; he went into barns, he talked about agricultural tractors; he was all the time asking questions and gathering as much information as possible. Then he went into the interior, not very far because it was not possible to go very far. There were no good roads. He travelled in a lorry. Everywhere he went, he was asking questions, firing the questions like bullets from a machine-gun. He never seemed to tire, and he was always in an excellent humour.

The city of Tripoli appeared to be in a very poor condition. It was Italy's only show colony, but it made no show whatsoever as compared to the French North African colonies. At the end of the visit there was a reception given in the Governor's Palace. It was well arranged. The house is not large, but it has a marble staircase, and on every step there was a huge Arab clothed in red. It was rather "Opéra-Bouffe," but quite in keeping with the general programme. That night a great crowd had gathered in the square outside the Governor's Palace, and all through the hours of the night there were shouts of: "Il Duce! Il Duce!" The windows giving on to a small balcony were wide open. Mussolini seemed not to hear

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

the shouts for him to come out and face the crowd. He was in a very good humour that night. He asked me questions concerning a certain woman journalist who had recently visited Rome. He remembered her name. He said to me: "How is Lady Blank? The last time I saw her she was sitting in an open motor-car outside the Pincio Gardens, with a typewriter on her knees." Then, to my amazement, Mussolini went through the pantomime of a person typing and continually hitching up the shoulder-strap of an undergarment.

"What was she doing?" I asked innocently.

"Writing lies about my health," snapped back Mussolini.

It was on the last day of the visit to Tripoli that there occurred something which stayed in my mind as being of paramount importance, and as I have suggested, it laid the foundation of the second Roman Empire. Late in the afternoon, Mussolini held a secret meeting. He had with him all the high Fascist officers, and also naval and military officers who had arrived in Tripoli as members of his entourage. There was also the Governor of Tripoli and others who held office in the Colonial Administration. The meeting began at five o'clock in the afternoon and lasted until seven-thirty. The doors were locked and guarded by Fascist militia. What took place behind those locked

—[*The Unholy Roman Empire*]—

doors, we are never likely to know. There is only one man with whom I am on speaking terms who was present at that meeting. He was a military officer who spoke fluent English and who had travelled to Tripoli with me in the cruiser. I saw him on the evening that the meeting had taken place. Naturally, I did not ask him any questions and I did not expect any information. My friend wore a grave, preoccupied air. Moreover, he did not seem to wish to be seen in my company. Without being asked, he informed me that Mussolini had made a long and most interesting speech. There, the matter remained.

Italy's part in colonial development is comparable to the rôle the cuckoo plays in ornithology. The cuckoo, as is well known, places its eggs in nests built by other birds. The Italian thrives best overseas when he works in territories exploited by his rivals. In other chapters of this book, I deal with the question of the high tension between France and Italy which arose in part because of the questions of the Italian settlers in French North African colonies and protectorates, but also because of the Italian settlers in France.

Italy, so far as is known, has not made any official protest to the United States Government because that Government closed down on Italian immigration. The Government of

Washington did not make any concession to any nation when it tightened up the laws of immigration, but no country suffers more than Italy. The Italian emigrant to the United States was a thrifty hard-working person who helped to build the railways of America. He was a very cheap labourer. He lived as he was used to live at home, and he saved hard and sent part of his earnings home, and then, when his days of labour were over, he returned home to live out the rest of his life on the savings he had brought with him. The United States benefited very much by this cheap labour which was so easily imported. Not only did the Italian labourer work on the railways, but he was a first-class mason, and he also helped to make the national roads. In laying asphalt he was an adept, and, as I have said, he never asked for very much money. The Italians went to the United States in their hundreds of thousands. The State of Connecticut is still very largely inhabited by Italians. They founded their own churches and their own newspapers. Grave troubles in Ireland arose because the Irish were no longer going to the United States in their thousands, as they had been doing for a great number of years. In Italy there was no actual trouble because the Italians had to stay at home, but the seething thousands who could

—[*The Unholy Roman Empire*]—

not go overseas to work for their living provided a very fine ground in which the seeds of discontent could be sown. They were sown, first by the Communists, and then by the Fascists, but I am slightly anticipating my own story.

Mussolini returned to Italy in the battleship *Cavour*, while I went back to Naples in an ordinary steamer. In my ship there travelled Mussolini's late brother, Arnaldo, who until his death was Il Duce's closest confidant and friend. There were other civilian members of Benito Mussolini's entourage travelling in my ship. We were due to drop anchor in Valetta Harbour and we were to spend some hours ashore in Malta. I have a very vivid recollection of the trip from Tripoli to Valetta. There was considerable talk among the Italians about Malta. They talked of Malta as a sort of Promised Land. They told one another that Malta was never British, but it was really Italian. Later on, travelling around and across the Mediterranean in Italian ships, I never made one journey without finding that we had with us on board an Italian agent who spoke English, French and German. For all I know he may have spoken other languages as well, but he made a point of getting into conversation with the nationals I have mentioned and he told them all in similar terms about the French

colonies of North Africa and about Malta. The agent spoke more in sorrow than in anger. He told English and American tourists that France was not able to run her own colonies. He pointed out, quite tactfully, I must admit, how much better Italy could manage these colonies if she had the opportunity. When asked point blank whether he thought Italy would ever have the opportunity, the Italian would smile and shrug his shoulders, as much as to say: "I know a lot more than I can say."

A woman traveller and myself were the only British subjects going from Tripoli back to Italy in this ship. Whenever we were near a group of Italians, official Italians, the conversation would veer round to Malta and its Italian background and population. Then one very fine spring evening, we drew near to the pretty harbour of Valetta. Arnaldo Mussolini and his friends stood near the rail looking at the sea. Perhaps because they had been tired by their journey, or perhaps for other reasons, the Italian party did not look very smart. Most of the men had not shaved that day. Arnaldo Mussolini's clothes looked very wrinkled indeed. Yet they talked excitedly between themselves and pointed to this British battleship and that cruiser. Nearer we drew to Valetta. The Italians continued to chatter. The sea was calm, perfectly smooth. There was

—[*The Unholy Roman Empire*]—

not a ripple on the surface of the Mediterranean. The sun was setting. The stars were coming out. Lights began to appear in the hills. A British naval motor launch darted across the harbour and came silently to the side of the quay. As our ship drew ever nearer, a cab rattled across the stony causeway. It stopped near the launch, and from the cab there stepped a woman in a dove-grey evening dress. In my mind's eye, I can still see her. Serene and handsome, she walked softly across the quay and a naval officer handed her into the motor launch, which sped away to the side of a battleship. Obviously just an ordinary evening scene in Valetta. A lady goes aboard a man-o'-war to dine.

We steamed in and dropped anchor. Maybe I had malice in my heart when I looked at that group of Italians. They did not say a word, but went down to dinner. They had decided, after all, that they would not go ashore.

Italian colonial history is a long chain of which every link was blackened by misfortune. It was only in 1870 that Italy became a united Kingdom. When Italy became a member of the Triple Alliance, she was still a second-rate power. The Italian Governments which succeeded each other were always of the same mind; it was a policy of *laissez faire*. The surplus population went to the United States, to

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

French North Africa, or to France itself. Thousands of others, of course, went to Great Britain to become the keepers of small cafés and hotels. There was nothing ever to trouble the unruffled surface of Italian life. True, Italy depended on other nations for her supply of raw materials, but her demands were not great and she had the money to buy these necessary raw materials from abroad. The attempts at establishing colonies were half-hearted. It is true Italy had two small possessions on the Red Sea, Eritrea and Somaliland, but they were not important. They were just trading-posts and wastes of empty desert land. The Italians did not want to go overseas and make colonies. That is a very important point which must always be borne in mind. There was no propaganda, no publicity of any sort to encourage the Italians to go and look for their living in the sand; there were so many better openings for them in other places, where other nationals had already pioneered their way to prosperity. Even an enlightened Italian statesman like Francesco Nitti, some time Prime Minister, who now lives in exile in Paris, was contemptuous of Italian colonial expansion. He knew.

With the approval of Great Britain and France, Italy had in 1887 attempted the conquest of Abyssinia, but had been heavily

—[*The Unholy Roman Empire*]—

defeated. Then, some twenty-five years later, the Italians, taking advantage of the weakness of the Turks—and again with British approval—tried to seize Tripolitania and after a war in which the Italians fared very badly, they managed to obtain Tripolitania, but at a great cost. Tripolitania, as I saw it through the eyes of Mussolini in 1926, was certainly not even a third-rate colony, and could not make any showing of any kind whatsoever. Count Volpi, who afterwards became Italian Minister of Finance, was the best Governor Tripoli ever had. Not even Volpi could do anything with it. The Italians did not want to go to Tripolitania any more than they wanted to go to the Italian possessions on the Red Sea. Do they want to go to Abyssinia now? Maybe they will have to go, whether they like it or not.

Then, Italy, as a second-rate power linked in the Triple Alliance to the two Germanic powers who themselves made up their minds to drive through into the Middle East, had no opportunity whatsoever of becoming a colonial Empire in the sense that Great Britain and France already were.

In the correspondence between Mr. Neville Chamberlain and Mussolini, reference is made to the traditional friendship between Great Britain and Italy, but it is very difficult to find there has ever been any real friendship.

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

Time and time again, Italy has been used by Great Britain when the trend of British foreign policy made it necessary for Italy to be used as a cat's-paw. It was in 1869 that the Italians settled on the Red Sea, and it was in 1869 that the Suez Canal was opened, and it was then thought in London to be a good idea to have Italy as a friend close to the Suez Canal, in case we should ever have trouble with France.

One should qualify the word friendship because this friendship was a matter of policy rather than a question of amity, a strong, or an even moderately strong Turkish Empire was not favoured by British foreign policy. Turkey was showing signs of breaking up as long ago as 1910; the "Sick Man of Europe" was very ill indeed. The Sultan was losing his grip over the Balkans, and Italy struck at the right moment. The war with Turkey cost Italy very dearly indeed. Hundreds of thousands of men were killed; millions of pounds were sunk in the sands of Africa, and although on paper Italy was the possessor of thousands of square miles, very few of them were ever likely to prove fertile. Had it not been for the weakness of Turkey and the benevolent neutrality of Great Britain, it is doubtful whether Italy would ever have won a foothold on the African shore of the Mediterranean. It was an act of benevolent neutrality

—[*The Unholy Roman Empire*]—

when Great Britain refused to allow the transport of Turkish troops across Egypt to take part in the conflict with Italy. Although I have written that I believed the foundation of the second Roman Empire was laid in Tripoli in April 1926, it stands to reason that if Italy had not managed to obtain a foothold, no foundation-stone would ever have been laid.

Once again, Great Britain gave Italy a proof of "friendship" when the secret Treaty of London was signed. This Treaty, I have already referred to in Chapter I. Great Britain, France and Russia offered Italy the chance of coming into the war. One of the bribes offered was a colony. It was therefore not Rome, but London, Paris and St. Petersburg which sowed those first seeds of the Italian colonial empire, which was to be the foundation of the second Roman Empire. There can be no question whatsoever that British, French and Russian foreign policies united, thwarted the Italian aspirations, legitimate aspirations, legitimate enough, because the aspirations were dangled in front of Italy like a bundle of carrots in front of a donkey.

We are told very often that Italy had to expand or burst. Since the United States closed down on Italian immigrants several thousands have been going to the South American Republics, but the income received

from overseas from these emigrants is dwindling and has been dwindling for a very long time. Italy has another source of "invisible" export, and that is tourist traffic. Thanks to the tourist Lira, the tourist traffic to Italy has been fairly good, but for how long can Italy depend on this traffic, and in saying this, I am assuming that Italy is not likely to embark on a war during the next six months. It might be expected that a wise and far-sighted statesman would, in the circumstances, not advocate large families for members of the population of a country which is not in a position to be self-supporting. Thanks to prizes offered and other inducements, the Italian population is increasing at the rate of nearly half a million a year. This is a sheer artificial increase. Before the boom in births, an artificially created boom, be it understood, the birth-rate in Italy was not particularly high. Yet, even though there are fewer places for the surplus population to go, the banging of the big birth-rate drum is a dangerous sign of one of the most sinister forms of the building of the second Roman Empire.

Although the Roman Catholic Church has never been able to make much out of Mussolini, Mussolini has made as much as possible out of the Roman Catholic Church. His quarrels with the Vatican are too well known to be repeated here. The signing of the

—[*The Unholy Roman Empire*]—

Lateran Treaty, as helpful as it might have been to the Vatican, was much more helpful to Mussolini. It brought over to his camp hundreds of thousands of people who, hitherto, had merely paid lip-service. The Roman Catholic Church is opposed to birth-control. *Ipso facto*, it is friendly to large families. If Italy had already possessed fertile lands overseas, it would have been an obvious thing for the Government to have advocated larger families, so that the Italian families could have gone overseas and populated the second Roman Empire. Yet, what do we find? The Italians go to France and settle wherever they can. They go to the United States and to the South American Republics, when they can. They go to Italian East Africa, to Abyssinia and to Tripolitania, when they are forced to go.

It is a very curious comment on the present world situation that in the two countries, Germany and Italy, which are screaming for territory, artificial increase of population has become a matter of national policy. The manner in which Mussolini has exploited the Vatican and the Roman Catholic Church in general helped him in his war on Spain which was intended to assist the building up of the new Empire; Spain was to be the western pillar. Mussolini himself was an atheist when he was professing Socialism; he became a

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

convert to the Roman Catholic Church after the birth of his eldest daughter, now the Countess Ciano, but being a convert did not prevent him fighting the Vatican tooth and nail, and using it as and when he could. Mussolini's clash with the British Foreign Office was in no small measure a clash with British Roman Catholicism. For many years, the permanent head of the Foreign Office was Sir William—now Lord—Tyrrell, a Roman Catholic who afterwards became Ambassador to Paris. During Lord Tyrrell's term of office, Sir Eric Drummond—now Lord Perth—a Scottish Roman Catholic became Ambassador to Rome, and another staunch Roman Catholic was Sir Walford Selby, formerly Ambassador to Vienna, the capital of Austria, when it was a vassal state of Mussolini.

When Mussolini invaded Spain, he embarrassed the British Foreign Office exceedingly. He was supporting the Roman Catholics, who have a very strong grip on the British Foreign Office, but he was against British interests. When this important point is sufficiently understood, the ebbing and flowing of British policy towards Spain may better be understood.

The fact that Major Ramón Franco, brother of the would-be Dictator of Spain, was a one-time Communist, as I have related, and previously a Royalist, but later an Anarchist,

—[*The Unholy Roman Empire*]—

was just the sort of thing which would appeal to an opportunist like Mussolini; before he was a Fascist, he was a Socialist, and before becoming a Roman Catholic, he was an atheist, and apart from these Fregoli rôles, Mussolini had some very useful experience in knowing how Communism can be exploited in self-interest.

In order to begin to understand these tactics, one must go back to 1920. Italy had her social and industrial troubles after the War like the other countries which had participated in the world upheaval. Conditions in Italy were not particularly bad; politically, they were chaotic, but considering the fact that in the military sense Italy had been badly defeated, matters might have been much worse. The ex-King of Spain personally informed the present writer that the Russian revolution had almost immediate repercussions in Spain. Directly after the War, the first repercussions were felt in Italy. There was no shortage of food, as there had been in Russia, but there was shortage of work. Italy, like Rumania, was a lucky country; she was defeated, but at the same time she was victorious. She achieved vast territories in which there was a foreign language majority. After celebrating the Treaty of St. Germain, Italy tried to face up to facts. The outstanding fact was that there was no work for the

hundreds of thousands of young men who had come out of the Army with nothing to do. In the ordinary way these young men could have gone abroad and found work immediately. Now this was impossible. What did they do?

A rough-and-ready scheme was to hand. The Italian Communist Party advocated direct action. The Party said in effect: "If the factories cannot find work for you, go and seize the factories and make them work." Politically speaking, Italy was a very backward nation. Men who were told to go and seize the factories did not need to be told twice. They thought it a very good idea.

It all seemed so very easy. All one had to do was to go into the factory and start up the machinery. In case the authorities refused to allow one to occupy the factory and make it work, all one had to do was to put machine-guns on the walls, build barbed-wire entanglements, and all would be well. In Turin, I saw both the Westinghouse Works and the Fiat Works in the hands of the so-called revolutionary Communists. They looked very bloodthirsty indeed. There were plenty of machine-guns and plenty of barbed wire. All that the Italian Communists lacked was discipline, and perhaps money. Lenin had sent words of encouragement, but no cash.

The furnaces went out; the wheels of the

machines did not turn. There was no money to buy food for the hungry women and children. Something seemed to be wrong with Communism. Nothing loath, the Communists started printing their own money, but the small shopkeepers refused to accept the notes as payment. People became hungrier and the movement soon petered out.

That is the plain truth about the so-called Communist movement in Italy. In Genoa there was a movement among members of the Seamen's Union to start an Anarchist revolution. The leader of this agitation was a Captain Giuoletti. He, so he told me, abhorred Communists. In Genoa harbour, a few ships flew the black flag; others flew the red flag. Scribbled on some walls were the words "Viva Lenin." The movement never went any further than that. The crushing of it was no great effort. Mussolini's claim to have crushed Communism in Italy is not, as John Gunther points out, taken seriously by anybody to-day, certainly not in Italy outside the ranks of the professional Fascists.

Yet Mussolini found the Communist movement, such as it was, very useful. His object was primarily to exploit it, something like a man fighting a shadow. Victory is so easy. In order to bring Italy into the war on the side of the Allies, French money was used,

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

I will not say invested. Living in Paris was the late Gabriele d'Annunzio. He could not leave Paris because he owed so much money. French secret funds paid the poet's debts and heavily subsidised him to make a lecture tour in Italy. One has no doubt that d'Annunzio was as sincere as Mussolini, who also accepted French money. Mussolini at that time was an ardent Socialist, but whereas other members of the Socialist Party were opposed to war, Mussolini advocated it. He found the backing of French finance extremely useful.

When the French Communist Party's activities in Italy failed, and everything was over, Mussolini started a campaign to crush it, as we have seen, but Mussolini needed money in order to build up a new Party. He could not go to France once again for money, but he turned to the big industrialists of Italy, and he told them that unless the anti-Social movement was crushed, it would rear up again and the factories would be seized for good and all. In a panic, the capitalists paid Mussolini the money he desired, and so the Fascist Party was launched. Mussolini is one of the most able organisers in Europe, of that there can be no doubt at all. He, with the help of his brother, Arnaldo, organised a Fascist Militia which numbered about a million and a half. Mussolini with his backing

—[*The Unholy Roman Empire*]—

was able to pay 20 Lire a day to every private in his army. There was no lack of recruits, because there was so much unemployment in Italy, and 20 Lire a day was almost a fortune. It is said in Italy to-day, even among Mussolini's supporters, that Mussolini in the beginning did support the occupation of the factories. The fact that the occupation failed was surely an advantage to Mussolini, who pointed out that the Socialist leadership was not strong enough. In the beginning, the Fascist Party was definitely anti-Royalist and therefore lacked the support of the Italian aristocracy. Since that moment, Mussolini has said continuously how he despises aristocrats. Later on, Mussolini dropped his anti-Royalist tendencies, and concentrated on strong-arm methods to break up resistance. The second Roman Empire has been built up with the same methods.

The strong-arm method consisted of beating up people, forcing strong doses of castor oil down their throats, and generally behaving like a hooligan. These methods had their effect. Italy became disciplined—through fear.

Ruthless and implacable as he is, Mussolini still had much to do if he was to continue pedalling the Italian bicycle. He had provided his countrymen with sensations, such as the bombardment of Corfu, but this was soon forgotten. Something else had to be done.

There came then the journey to Tripoli to which I have already alluded as the main-spring of the second Roman Empire. Then came the Abyssinian campaign and success such as Mussolini never dreamed of.

The campaign in the beginning did not go well, but Mussolini had the courage to change his Commander-in-Chief, and thereafter matters, in the military sense, proceeded very well indeed, although Mussolini had trouble elsewhere.

The coals of the fire of fate were heaped heavily on the heads of Great Britain and France. If these two nations had implemented the work of the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, we should not have found ourselves at such a disadvantage as we did when Mussolini was driving back the Abyssinians. We were neither fully armed nor fully disarmed. Mussolini was better equipped to tackle a great European problem than we or France were. The Laval-Hoare muddle is too recent history to repeat again now. It might have saved British and French faces, and it might have saved Italy a great deal of money, but it is doubtful whether it would have stopped Mussolini marching on. It has been said often enough that he likes power and intends to retain it as long as he possibly can. He has founded his own dynasty and he intends

—[*The Unholy Roman Empire*]—

that the Mussolini dynasty shall rule over the Roman Empire. The inner Fascist Council has often debated the question; Mussolini has never debated the question; he has settled it. He first appointed his brother, Arnaldo, as his successor, but when his brother died and his sons were so young, he decided that Count Ciano, his son-in-law, should be his successor. But it is no use being a King unless you have a Kingdom. The deserts on the Red Sea, Tripolitania and even Abyssinia, were only very poor parts of an Empire. Mussolini had to look further afield if he was going to establish a Roman Empire worthy of his dynasty. Thus we come to Spain.

As recently as the early part of 1936, those who had listened to Mussolini in moments of expansion knew that he had the very greatest contempt for Hitler. He thought Hitler had aped his own manner. Once in a speech, Mussolini had referred to the great future Italy had on the water, but he quickly added that he was not copying anybody. He must have thought that people's minds would have flown to a sentence in a speech by the ex-Kaiser when he said: "Our future lies on the water." Because Mussolini had a stomach ailment, he dieted himself. When he knew that Hitler did not eat meat, he thought that Hitler had copied what he, Mussolini, had done through

sheer necessity. The murder of Dr. Dollfuss and the blood purge in Germany thoroughly shocked Mussolini, used as he is to gangster methods. At that moment, when he mobilised an Army corps on the Brenner Pass, he never thought that in the near future he would be hand in glove with Hitler. Spain, not Austria, was the bridge between the two Dictators.

Germany has had, through the years, a vicarious interest in the Mediterranean. In 1910, Germany and France were almost at war over the Agadir incident. As we have seen, during the World War, when Germany had submarine bases in the Mediterranean, she had very great interests there, and even after she lost her legal interests in Tangiers, she still tried to retain some influence by various forms of intrigue. Then again, Spain possesses minerals which Germany, as well as Italy, lacks. On the Spanish side of the Pyrenees there are great deposits of wolfram which is necessary in the process of hardening steel. During the World War, Spanish merchant vessels made money smuggling wolfram out of Spain into Germany. There is copper, too, in Spain, copper in vast quantities, and both Germany and Italy lack copper. There is nickel, and both Germany and Italy need nickel very badly. Those are the material interests, and there is no doubt that Germany has more

—[*The Unholy Roman Empire*]—

material interests than strategic interests. Italy, on the other hand, is interested both in material and strategy. There was, then, a common bond between the two "have not" nations. How could they be drawn closer together?

There appears now in the Mediterranean scene a very curious and sinister personage named Señor Juan March. Despite the English-sounding name, March is said to be a Jew from Majorca. He is a typical product of the Mediterranean. Although perhaps he lacks the subtlety of the late Sir Basil Zaharoff, likewise a Mediterranean by-product who came from the Levant, March has waxed rich in his own manner. During the World War, March was interested in supplying the Germans with what they needed. He was a Spanish subject and there was nothing to prevent him doing what he did. The War over, March became interested in Spanish high finance and put through some very forward-looking deals, and he secured the tobacco monopoly. Then came the fall of the Monarchy, and protection was withdrawn from March, who became an enemy of the Republic.

March at first contacted Gil Robles, head of the Catholic Party in Spain and a disciple of Hitler. He had spent some time in Germany and had come back to discuss the possibility of forming a Fascist nation in

Spain. March, however, was not quite convinced as to the advisability of this scheme. A Fascist régime did not quite suit him; what March wanted was the restoration of the Spanish Monarchy. The ex-King of Spain had been living for some time in a villa on the outskirts of Rome. He had managed to retain a vast part of his fortune, all that part that he had invested abroad long before his throne toppled over. Ex-King Alfonso listened with the greatest interest to the words of his old friend, Juan March. It seemed quite easy, there was unrest in Spain, the Republic was losing ground; all that was perfectly true, as we have seen in an earlier chapter. But the King had known other attempts at revolution; he knew that Spanish revolutions seldom proved successful. Perhaps he remembered that Sunday night in Madrid, when he left too soon.

There comes now across the Mediterranean scene another strange character, Señor Calvo Sotelo. Sotelo had had for some time the idea of uniting the German and Italian Fascist Parties. He thought, too, of setting up a Fascist régime in Spain, with Gil Robles at the helm. Neither Sotelo nor March could possibly appear as the head of a Fascist movement in Spain; some other chieftain had to be found. Sotelo, apparently, was not in favour of a restoration of the Spanish Monarchy, but he

went ahead on his own, a little in advance of March, who wished to proceed more slowly, but more surely. On July 4th, 1936, some of Sotelo's followers went to a Spanish Socialist meeting in Madrid and there murdered seven members. That started a series of political murders, and Sotelo himself was a victim. He was murdered in a very brutal manner.

During the time when these murders were taking place in Madrid, March was making his own arrangements, certainly not as the direct agent of King Alfonso, but more with the assistance of the Italian Government. The ex-King himself was not quite sure that he desired a bloodthirsty uprising in Spain; he was always opposed to bloodshed, quite sincerely he was. But March did not want to let slip the opportunity to regain all that he had lost in Spain. Juan March thought that General Francisco Franco was a man who was likely to lead a successful revolution in Spain. Franco at that time was Commander-in-Chief of the Spanish forces in Africa. March had persuaded both Rome and Berlin, the latter by sending his own agents, that it would require very little material assistance from them to bring about a most successful revolution. It was quite sure, March assured Mussolini and Hitler, that when the new Government was set up important concessions would be granted to both Italy and Germany.

One may take it for granted that Germany, in the beginning, was perfectly satisfied that she would obtain concessions of an advantageous nature. It may be taken for granted that the invasion of Spain by the Italian and German forces was the beginning of the secret understanding between Rome and Berlin. It is equally evident that whatever plans Mussolini had in his mind, he was going to share with Germany only inasmuch as he could draw extra profit from such an understanding. Mussolini did not lose sight of the material advantages which might be obtainable at a very small cost, but he, with his clear-sighted vision, did see at the time the offer was made to him, that he could draw from the Spanish adventure so much strategic profit that the gamble was certainly worth his while. The Abyssinian adventure had cost Italy some £20,000,000; Italy could not afford to risk so much money, but here was something which looked fairly cheap. Then troubles began.

Spain, for more than two years, has been the trying-out ground for all kinds of new weapons of war. It is no doubt true that the war in Spain endangered the peace of Europe, but perhaps some consolation may be found in the fact that as the Italian and German weapons of war have not been powerful enough or the war machines efficient enough to overcome

the weaker Spanish war material, it is possible that peace will reign on earth a little while longer, at least until the better weapons of war have been fashioned.

Before examining the strategic move which Mussolini intended to make, it may not be without profit to recall that a few weeks before Franco made his coup in Spain, a Paris weekly paper, of a very doubtful financial parentage, asserted that the British Government had come to an arrangement with certain foreign persons to finance a revolution in Spain, and as to the reward Great Britain was to receive for her financial assistance; this was nothing less than the right to use the Balearic Islands as a submarine base. It is quite interesting to recall that very soon after this statement was made, the Italians dug themselves in in the Balearic Islands and have been there without let or hindrance for the past two years.

The three islands of the Balearic are: Majorca, Minorca, and Ybiza. It can be safely said that these three islands in the hands of a hostile nation would seriously threaten the naval power of Great Britain and France. Italy's islands in the Mediterranean include Sardinia, Rhodes, and the Dodecanese Isles, yet there is one of even greater value than any others. That is the island of Pantelaria. This island is half-way between Sicily

and Tunis. Before the early part of 1938, very few readers of newspapers had ever heard of it. In August 1938, Mussolini paid a visit to it.

The Island of Pantellaria shares with Lipari the honour of being one of Mussolini's most secret islands. Lipari is his *confino*, his very secret and private *confino*, but Pantellaria is his arsenal, his naval base and his threat to the Mediterranean.

This writer believes that the end of the war in Spain is not yet, and until the war is over the coping-stone cannot be laid to the second Roman Empire. General Franco, speaking as the head of the insurgents in Spain, has affirmed that not one inch of Spanish territory will ever pass into the hands of a foreigner. Whether Franco knows it or not, many millions of Spaniards will add their "no" to his. And yet, if Italy cannot have the Balearic Islands, her new Empire will never be complete. The Island of Pantellaria is like a pair of scissors, ready to cut communications between North Africa and France; the south of Italy and North Africa. Nevertheless, the scissors will not be able to cut until the western end of the Mediterranean is Mussolini's very own.

As I close this chapter there comes the news that Mr. Chamberlain will go to Rome. Will he be able to delay the action of the scissors?

Part II

France Holds the Stage

STROLLERS along the Boulevards of Paris in July 1938 saw large posters being pasted up. The posters told a story. There was very little letterpress; it was sufficient to look at the picture, a picture of Spain as it was, but there was no line of demarcation between the territories held by Franco and the territories held by the Government. What was really interesting was the fact that along the Spanish side of the Pyrenees was a line of aeroplanes, and each aeroplane had a swastika on its wings. The aeroplanes were all heading for France. In the other part of Spain there were marks showing gun emplacements, and the guns were Italian guns. This poster made the Parisians stop and think. Here, suddenly, was a new hostile frontier. Generations of Frenchmen have known that Germany was a menace. Despite the tension between France and Italy, the average Frenchman was not disposed to

look upon an Italian as an enemy. The newspapers used always to be full of allusions to "our sister nation." In 1937, some attention was paid to Italian aspirations. I am thinking as a man in the street and looking at the problem through the eyes of an ordinary Frenchman. Then, when the war in Spain had been dragging on for two years, coinciding with the appearance of the poster to which I have alluded, the ordinary Frenchman rubbed his eyes. An enemy to the north, an enemy to the east, and a combination of the two enemies on the south-west. What to do about it?

Frankly, France has never regarded her Mediterranean frontier as a particularly important one. Although France has a long southern sea-board frontier, she came late into Mediterranean politics. All French colonial development was, for centuries, away from the Mediterranean, and the countries whose geographical frontiers it formed. Canada and the southern parts of the North American sub-continent made an irresistible magnet which attracted hardy French pioneers. Then came Napoleon Bonaparte from Corsica, and he first showed France that she had a destiny in the Mediterranean. Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt was an alternative to the invasion of England. When Napoleon sailed from Toulon

—[*France Holds the Stage*]—

for Alexandria, he stopped at the Island of Malta long enough to capture it. Then he moved on to the Near East, but French aspirations and Napoleon's genius were both frustrated by superior British naval strength.

It is not without interest to recall that Napoleon Bonaparte, who first attracted the attention of France to her own destiny in the southern sea, was himself a son of that sea. Long before his time, the southern coast of France had been raided by the Moors who crossed the Mediterranean and pillaged long tracks of unprotected country. Not only are traces of Moorish blood still to be found in southern France, but there is even a chain of hills which is named after the dusky invaders: *Montagne des Maures*.

France, as a nation, is to-day hostile to Italy because France, as a nation, is hostile to Fascism. There is no deep-rooted hostility towards Italy. The hostility between Italians and Frenchmen could be cleared up in a moment, if they could talk together, man to man. There are hundreds of thousands of Italians living peacefully in France, and if one excludes the active Fascist agents, one could say with absolute truth that the overwhelming majority of the Italians living in France are anti-Fascist. Soon after peace with Germany was signed, there were anti-French

demonstrations in various parts of Italy. These demonstrations occurred long before the advent of Mussolini, and the demonstrations were spontaneous and sincere. The demonstrations against France, and they were serious enough in their way, occurred because the Italian people thought that France stood between them and their legitimate aspirations. In those days, the Italian mind had not gone as far as wanting the whole of the Mediterranean. The Italians would have been perfectly content if they had the whole of the Adriatic to themselves. They feared Yugo-Slavia, that little country known as Serbia, which had expanded so greatly at the cost of other countries. England was not much more popular in Italy than France, and the United States were more unpopular than either. It was felt that President Wilson and Mr. Lloyd George and M. Clemenceau were all united together in a desire to keep Italy out of Fiume. Italy cut the Gordian knot and took Fiume, and that was the end for some time of anti-French feeling. A number of blunders and misunderstandings led up to a more serious and deeper-rooted bad feeling between the two countries, the two countries as controlled from Paris and Rome.

In 1923, when Mussolini was in sole control of Italian diplomatic relations, he tried to

—[*France Holds the Stage*]—

open negotiations with France, but there was no accredited French Ambassador in Rome. The former Ambassador, Camille Barrère, was an old man, and he had only remained at his post in Rome because of the War; he was long past retiring age. M. Barrère, without actually resigning his post, had returned to France on leave, and M. Poincaré who, at that moment, was busy occupying the Ruhr, had not nominated a successor. It is an important point to mark, because Mussolini did not approve the occupation of the Ruhr. Mussolini and Mr. Bonar Law agreed that it was not an opportune moment to further humiliate Germany, although Mussolini, like Mr. Bonar Law, agreed tacitly to support the French move, but whereas Great Britain sent a small detachment of British troops with the French, Mussolini contented himself with sending two Italian engineers.

The Ruhr defeated M. Poincaré, and in June 1924 M. Edouard Herriot took office and sent M. René Besnard as Ambassador to Rome. M. Besnard worked hard for the betterment of relations between Paris and Rome. He was personally quite popular with Mussolini, and the two men agreed to bury the past. M. Besnard drew up a draft agreement for the liquidation of all outstanding questions between France and Italy. He sent this draft to the

Quai d'Orsay; he sent it three times, but he obtained no acknowledgement. M. Aristide Briand had succeeded M. Herriot as Minister for Foreign Affairs, but the fact that M. Besnard's suggestion was not acknowledged was not the fault of M. Briand, but the fault of the Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, M. Philippe Berthelot, who had been sacked by M. Poincaré, but who was taken back by M. Herriot. The late M. Philippe Berthelot did not like Mussolini, and that was that.

M. René Besnard, sad and disillusioned, sent in his resignation and returned to Paris. No successor was appointed. The Socialists, and the Government then in power, were so anti-Mussolini that matters drifted from bad to worse. The French Press of the Left attacked Mussolini daily, and he lost patience with France and became very angry indeed. M. Camille Aymard, in his excellent work *Le Drame de la Méditerranée*, states that when he was in Rome in September 1927 (at that moment he was the Editor of the reactionary *Liberté*), he called on Mussolini and discussed Franco-Italian relations with him. Mussolini put forward three points which he said formed his programme. He wanted the frontiers between Tunisia and Tripolitania rectified, a rectification according to the secret Treaties of 1915 and 1917.

He wanted the Franco-Italian Convention of 1896 relating to the status of Italians in Tunisia renewed.

The third point was that France should put an end to the anti-Fascist agitation which was, Mussolini said, fomented in French territory.

When M. Aymard returned to Paris, he went to see M. Aristide Briand and told him what had taken place in Rome. M. Briand showed considerable interest, and about two months later asked M. Aymard to come and see him; he asked him to go immediately, that very night, back to Rome and see Mussolini. The message M. Aymard was to take was that M. Briand was ready to accept Mussolini's three points as the basis of negotiations. M. Aymard took the train to Rome. The same evening, M. Briand made a speech in the Chamber of Deputies and announced that negotiations with Rome were about to commence.

Strange as it may seem, there had been no French Ambassador in Rome for two years. M. Briand then appointed Count de Beaumarchais. This appointment was not a very great success. The Ambassador's task was made more difficult because anti-Fascist movements in France continued, and there were anti-Italian demonstrations in Tangiers. Then in November 1927 France signed a military alliance with Yugo-Slavia, and forgot to inform

the French Ambassador in Rome beforehand. Italy considered the military alliance between Paris and Belgrade as a threat to her security. Rome very ostentatiously renewed her pact with Albania, and relations between Paris and Rome immediately grew worse. Then Beaumarchais died, and once again France, for a long period, had no Ambassador in Rome. The French Elections of 1932 brought Edouard Herriot back to the Foreign Office in Paris, and he nominated M. Henri de Jouvenel, a journalist, as Ambassador to Rome. Mussolini, an ex-journalist, and Jouvenel, an ex-journalist, became great friends. Relations began to improve, and on June 7th, 1933, a Four-Power Pact was signed in Rome. It seemed as if Europe could look forward to a long period of peace.

On January 7th, 1935, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs was M. Pierre Laval; he was the first French Foreign Minister in years to go to Rome and talk matters over personally. He saw Mussolini, and at the *Palacio Venezia* he signed a Treaty which put an end to a long period of tension between France and Italy. Mussolini at that time appeared perfectly satisfied with the Treaty. Yet, not very long afterwards, he spoke to an English journalist in the most contemptuous terms of the advantages Italy had received from this Treaty.

Matters drifted along until the war in

—[*France Holds the Stage*]—

Abyssinia, and then France was torn two ways. She decided to stand by Great Britain; there was an immediate rupture between Paris and Rome. Finally, after Abyssinia had been conquered and the King of Italy made Emperor of Abyssinia, France made up her mind she could not recognise the conquest, and recognition meant rather more than a speech or the publication of a decree. It meant that a French Ambassador appointed to Rome must go to the Royal Palace to present his credentials and he must address the Italian Sovereign as King of Italy and Emperor of Abyssinia. That is the Rubicon which no French Ambassador has, up till this moment of writing¹, passed, although in October 1938 a French Ambassador to Rome was appointed. True, the Government of Washington has also not recognised the conquest of Abyssinia although it has stepped over the diplomatic difficulty by what is known as "diplomatic deafness." When the new American Ambassador to Rome was appointed and went to hand in his credentials, the King was conveniently deaf for a split second when he was addressed only as King of Italy, and no mention was made of his Emperorship. Similarly, when the Italian Ambassador to Washington went to the White House to present his credentials to President

¹ The Italian Empire was recognised by France on Nov. 19th, 1938.

Roosevelt, the President was also deaf for a flash while the Italian Ambassador said that he presented the compliments of his august master the "King of Italy and Emperor of Abyssinia." Mr. Roosevelt did not hear the last three words.

Let us now turn to France's other Mediterranean neighbour, Spain. Relations between France and Spain have also been full of misfortunes. The ex-King of Spain always professed the greatest friendship and admiration for France, but nevertheless he suspected France of assisting the Separatist movement in Catalonia. With the overthrow of the Monarchy and the establishment of the Spanish Republic, it seemed for some time as if Spain and France would be very friendly indeed, for both nations had a very similar régime. The French policy in the Mediterranean has always had to depend very largely on Spain. Long before there was any question of Italy intervening in Spanish affairs, there was always the question of Spain being a prop to French policy in the southern sea. Moreover, for long years, French Mediterranean policy has been dictated by the French General Staff. It is a long way from the Mediterranean frontier to the Maginot Line, but the Maginot Line and the Mediterranean are closely linked.

General Mangin—who died so mysteriously—was the French Army expert when it came to

colonial troops. It was General Mangin who commanded the so-called Iron Division which struck the decisive blow of the War. His troops were colonial troops. During the World War, France had brought troops from overseas to fight in France. It was not, however, until very near the end of the War that the coloured soldiers were used as what were known as "thrusting" troops. They were the Storm Troopers of France, and if the War had continued, France would have depended almost entirely on these black soldiers. According to League of Nations figures, 43 per cent of the French Army consists to-day of coloured troops. These, of course, are not the entirely black or the café-au-lait, but they also include the yellow Anamites from Indo-China. It is unlikely that these troops would ever be brought to France in large quantities, but North Africa, stretching down even as far as the Congo, is termed by the French General Staff the "Reservoir of men."

As I have said, it was long before Italy loomed large in the Mediterranean picture that France had to try and make sure that Spain, either as a neutral or a potential enemy, could be "taken care of." King Alfonso's protestations of extreme friendship were regarded with mixed feeling by practically every French Government, no matter

which label the French Government wore. Then when General Primo de Rivera was Dictator and he publicly promised the Balearic Islands to Italy, there was a real scare in the inner councils of the French General Staff. The French Ambassador to Madrid was instructed to take soundings, and subsequently the Dictator withdrew his offer, and it must be said in fairness to Mussolini, that Italy did not make any capital out of this extraordinary happening in Spain.

The French General Staff had three plans with regard to the Mediterranean, and Spain was bound to play a prominent part in any of the three schemes. One scheme was known as the Canal of the two Seas. It was a plan to link the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Not only would the French men-o'-war pass through this canal, but there was also an idea that the black troops from North Africa could have been brought up the coast of Portugal, then through the canal, and landed either on the banks of the canal or at the western end. This was quite obviously a somewhat clumsy scheme, but nevertheless it has never been shelved and it is still in the pigeon-holes of the French General Staff. It is backed more by the Ministry of Marine than by the War Office.

After the Spanish Monarchy fell, there were delicate negotiations between Paris and Madrid

—[*France Holds the Stage*]—

concerning the transport of black troops across Spain in the event of war. The French railways and the Spanish railways have a different gauge, that is why travellers have always had to change trains at the Spanish frontier. The French Government offered to pay for the re-tracking of the Spanish line from Irun to Madrid, and from Madrid to Algeciras. Negotiations were still proceeding when the Franco revolution started.

There was yet a more sensational scheme. In 1935 an engineer named Ibanez de Ibero, and a Colonel Jevenois, called at the French Ministry of War with a scheme to build a tunnel from Africa to Europe. The African end of the tunnel was to be at a point west of Tarifa, which is in Spanish territory. The idea was that the tunnel would therefore be entirely Spanish. For a long time the scheme was discussed in secret. The cost was tremendous, but France thought that the cost would be justified. The French Military Staff had a very simple plan. It was to use the French black troops as thrusting troops after they had been trained in France. The Maginot Line was to hold off the enemy, but it was also to be the supporting line of the eventual attack, and the eventual attack would have been made by the French colonial troops after they had become acclimatised.

Those who have driven by road to the Riviera will perhaps recall that French colonial troops are garrisoned along the main road all the way from Paris to the South. One may see regiments of Moorish cavalry; Algerian troops too, and battalions of coal-black Senegalese. These colonial troops are brought from overseas and put into barracks in France for varying periods. During the winter months there are always plenty of North African troops. This, for very obvious reasons.

During the World War, the Mediterranean coast, particularly between Toulon and Fréjus, was the training-ground for thousands of troops which had been brought across the Mediterranean. No troopship bearing black soldiers was ever torpedoed. When the black soldiers landed in France, they were put in horizon-blue uniforms, and then, with white officers and white non-commissioned officers, they went into strict training. Bringing these men from the jungle to civilisation was a great experiment. It is true that England had brought Indian troops to France, right at the beginning of the War, and this experiment had been a very bad failure, but nevertheless, troops which had come from India had come from the civilisation which was not very different from the civilisation they were to find waiting at journey's end. With the

African soldiers, it was a very different matter. These men had known absolutely nothing of civilisation; they were just black savages. Nevertheless, the general behaviour of the black troops brought across the Mediterranean was exemplary. There was hardly one instance of bad behaviour. Certainly the French took every possible precaution. In the camps around Fréjus were high wooden towers; on the top of every tower was a machine-gun, and with the machine-gun was a white soldier. This was just in case of accidents, but no accident ever happened. Those who were privileged to see, as I was, these black troops in training, could not help being extremely surprised. Pessimistic stories had circulated concerning the morals of the men from Africa; there were thousands of women whose husbands had gone to the front and who were left alone and unprotected in wild and lonely districts, about which I shall have something to say in a moment. How could these women be protected? The question never arose. Not one white woman was ever molested by a black soldier from Africa.

After the War, when France sent black troops to garrison Frankfurt, there was a great outcry, and not in Germany alone, but also in the United States, and to a lesser degree in England. M. Poincaré, who refused to take

any notice of protests, did, I think, make a bad tactical error, because those who were not particularly pro-German, became anti-French because of the use of black troops. Nevertheless, a country like France faced by an enemy, Germany, with a population which is certainly 50 per cent bigger than her own, must logically look for some means to fill the gaps in the ranks. The only possible way to fill those gaps is to fill them with black men. It is perhaps a very uncomfortable commentary on civilisation, but one cannot really believe that the use of black troops in time of war is worse than the crime of war itself.

What I may term, then, the new Mediterranean policy of France began during the World War; has been intensified during the years which have followed; and has been keyed up to a higher pitch since Italy began to be an enemy of France. While the three schemes already mentioned were under examination, France began to build a submarine base at Agadir. Curiously enough, when that base was being built, it was intended as a measure which was more anti-British than anti-Italian.

Not so very many years ago, Great Britain was regarded as a greater enemy than Italy. Policies in the Mediterranean have changed swiftly enough, but nothing has been stranger

than the change of French policy. Agadir was intended to threaten British maritime traffic passing northwards. Since the closer ties with Great Britain and the tension between Paris and Rome, French policy has been directed wholly and solely towards safeguarding the transport of black soldiers to France.

The French had every reason to believe that once the age-old feuds between England and France ceased to exist, France might have had peace for generations in the Mediterranean. The first signs of a serious quarrel between France and Italy showed up when the two countries argued about naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. Until that time, there are signs that France never really considered Italy as a rival. French Naval Intelligence, which had been most brilliant during the World War, had obviously overlooked many of the signs which showed that Italy was beginning to turn her most serious attention to the Mediterranean. Travellers perhaps had their eyes opened wider than the French Intelligence officers. Take, for instance, the case of Bari on the eastern coast of Italy. Bari was just a sleepy port of no particular importance. Then, suddenly, notices were found stuck up all over the town informing travellers that they must not carry cameras. Plain-clothes detectives followed foreigners wherever they went.

Evidently there was something doing in Bari. What was happening became evident soon enough; Bari was transformed from a commercial port to a naval base. In 1927 there was a Naval Conference in London, when there was an attempt to build up a Five-Power Pact. Neither France nor Italy showed any desire to come to terms, and the Pact was never drawn up. I recall travelling to the United States with the late Mr. Ramsay MacDonald when he went to visit President Hoover and to arrange Naval parity between Great Britain and the United States. One day, sitting in his cabin on the way over, the late Prime Minister made it very clear what British policy was. He said in effect that it did not matter how many warships the United States had, we could reduce our tonnage as low as they liked, but if France or Italy began to build ships, then we should have to take notice. Sure enough, Italy did begin to build ships, and build them very rapidly, and we did take notice. Yet in Paris they did not care very much; they thought that Italy would never be able to find the money to build a Navy as powerful as France had even at that time. France had only one object in view, and that object was to see ships bringing black men from North Africa across in safety. France did not fear Italian guns, and she did not think any

further than German submarines appearing once again in the Mediterranean as they did in the years of 1914-1918. Then, when the strength of Italian preparation for the domination of the Mediterranean hit France full in the face, she had to make terms with England, because it was impossible for her to combat both Italy and Germany, and this even before those two countries intervened in Spain and gave France yet another frontier to defend.

The French Foreign Office while allowing the General Staff to dictate the policy of defence of French frontiers, thinks of yet another problem which is vitally concerned with the Mediterranean. France needs petrol to drive her aeroplanes; petrol to motivate her tanks, and petrol for hundreds of thousands of motor lorries which one day will rush black troops into the firing line. Petrol is a nightmare to the French permanent officials.

In 1922, when the late M. Aristide Briand went to Washington, he created a great sensation by telling the world that France intended to build bigger and better submarines. This statement shocked Great Britain as it shocked the United States. It was thought that France and French opinion abhorred submarine warfare as much as the other nations did. But France had made up her mind that submarines would have to replace

the battleships she could not afford to build. This plan has always been in the forefront when the question of defence has been discussed, yet France needs petrol for her submarines just as much as she does for her land forces. Almost half of the petrol France imports during times of peace comes from the United States. France is one of the best customers that the Standard Oil Company has on its books. Yet, as powerful as the Standard Oil Company is, it cannot guarantee the safe arrival of its goods on the shores of France during a war. In other words, the war-time petrol supply of France would have to come through the Mediterranean, and not across the Atlantic. At the present moment, France is obtaining about half of her necessary supply of petrol from Iraq. The oil is pumped into French tankers at Tripoli, and after a fairly long journey it arrives at Marseilles and other French Mediterranean ports. The attacks of Arab terrorists on petrol pipe lines, has already drawn attention to one source of grave danger. The other source still remains. It is no use commanding the North going traffic from Africa if there are no ways of finding a necessary supply of oil, and France knows or feels that she is not in a position to assure the supply of petrol coming from the eastern Mediterranean to the south shore of France.

—[*France Holds the Stage*]—

In order to assure herself of a war-time supply of petrol, France is prepared to pay a very big reward for a synthetic oil which can be used for the same purpose that petrol is used. There has been no shortage of ideas, but until now there has been nothing shown to the French War Office which has stood up against the strong tests which synthetic petrol must pass before it can be adopted. During the past ten years the French War Ministry has spent millions of pounds on experiments. The most promising experiments revolved round a simple enough idea. A French engineer showed how a motor vehicle could be driven cheaply and efficiently on a spirit distilled from wood. It was pointed out, and with reason, that France is one of the richest nations in forest land. It would take generations to use up all the trees that abound in France. There is so much secrecy surrounding this question of substitute petrol, that it is difficult to know whether any wood spirit is actually being made in France, but it is certain that France is storing up huge reserves of petrol which she is at present buying from the United States, and also from the lands which she has leased for the purpose of pumping oil through Syria to Tripoli.

France at the same time is interested in obtaining oil from Morocco. From time to

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

time there are reports of rich petrol finds, but for many years there have been stories of rich copper finds, yet very little copper, if any, has ever come out of Morocco. Nevertheless, with regard to petrol, France has not given up hope that one day she may really strike oil in her own possessions in North Africa, and then she will be able to tap the Dark Continent both for men and oil, and, providing she can safeguard the transport of boats across the Mediterranean, her nightmare will be over.

Those who go to the South of France for sunshine, either in the winter or the summer, and who spend their time at Cannes, Nice, Juan-les-Pins, Ste. Maxime, or any of the smaller places which abound along the sunny shores, can know little of the wild conditions of the South of France. One can wander inland from the sea and travel far without seeing a soul. Marseilles is the headquarters of the Fifteenth Army Corps. The Fifteenth Army Corps went into action very soon after war broke out in 1914, and they met with many misfortunes and thousands of them were taken prisoners. Therefore the women of the South were left for four years alone; their husbands prisoners in Germany. Yet, if they did not see their husbands, they saw plenty of Germans. There were many German war

prisoners' camps in the wilder part of the South of France. The late Lady Armstrong, the widow of a former Governor in Australia, owned large properties along the Bay of Cavalaire, and close to her property were several camps where the German prisoners worked. The prisoners were guarded by territorials, men who were too old or too infirm to go into the firing line. The German prisoners were very well-behaved young men. Apparently they liked living in the mild climate of the South, yet occasionally they managed to break out of camp and stay away. At the same time, there were a certain number of deserters, men who did not want to go to war with the Fifteenth Army Corps. Even in times of peace a Frenchman may desert from the Army and remain in hiding for years; sometimes, of course, he is caught very quickly, but when he takes to the hills he is very seldom found. In 1915, and onwards, a very curious situation arose in the district I have already mentioned in this book. The *Montagnes des Maures*, the wild and hilly districts in the hinterland of the Mediterranean, became a sanctuary both for French deserters and escaped German prisoners of war. Even more strangely, these Frenchmen and Germans who had no personal animosity towards one another, became friends, and they spoke a curious jargon, a medley of

French and German, but they got on very well together. They lived hidden away from the eyes of man. Their wants were few; they shot squirrels and rabbits and lived as wild men do, but men no wilder than those who were living underground with other guns in their hands. The guns the Germans and the Frenchmen used in the Mountains of the Moors were sporting rifles; I do not know how they obtained them. Perhaps they "borrowed" them, really I do not know, but I do know how astonished I was late one evening in the village *bistrot* at Cavalaire when I was talking to the local *gendarme*. There came into the *bistrot* a young man who had not shaved very recently. He looked at me with suspicion, but the *patronne*, whose husband was a prisoner in Germany, nodded reassuringly. Then he closed the door behind him and shook hands with the *gendarme*, and with two or three other people who were there. Then he talked to the *patronne* and asked her if she had news of her husband; he accepted a drink and sat down next to the *gendarme*. From a pocket he pulled some squirrels' pelts. There was a little whispering and then one of the men sitting in the bar went over and talked. Then he talked to the *patronne*, and after whispering for about half an hour and giggling, the young man with the

beard handed over the squirrels' skins and received some pellets. Bit by bit, the story was pieced together. A regular trade was done between the Germans and the French, who traded the animal skins for shot and food. The young man in the *bistrot* that night was quite a wit. After he had been assured that I was no enemy, he showed off his knowledge of German. He had been delegated to come to the village to get pellets and also food. He took another drink, and before shaking hands with all of us he enquired with a comic accent: "*Wo ist der Fleisch?*" He obtained his meat, wrapped up in a piece of newspaper, and went back to the hills.

For reasons on which I am not allowed to dwell, I spent some considerable time during the War in these unexplored places on the borders of the Mediterranean. Were there German submarine bases along that coast? Time and time again, we were given information; time and time again, we arrived too late. Maybe the stories we were told, the circumstantial evidence we collected, were all nonsense, yet, not so far away, along the Mediterranean, the Germans had as many submarine bases as they needed, in Spain.

The opportunities the Germans had for exploiting the Mediterranean coast were many. The war was such a long way away, so said

the people who lived on the borders of the Mediterranean. "Ah," they said, "those people up in the North, they do make a noise." The people of Marseilles have a reputation for exaggeration and boastfulness. There is a war-time story told of this most wicked of French cities. The terrace of a Marseilles café was crowded at *apéritif* time. In the clear blue sky an aeroplane droned. Marius stood up, lounged across the pavement, looked up and came back, and said to the *apéritif* sippers: "It's all right, it's one of ours."

Of course, that was very funny. To think it possible that any enemy aeroplane would ever fly over Marseilles, but times have changed. In the next war, Marseilles will be just as much in the war zone as any frontier town in the North. To harp back to those old war days; in the region between Toulon and Marseilles, the local inhabitants always knew when the French were about to start an offensive up North. The telephone service was cut off. There wasn't a child too small to lisp: "They're going to start fighting again up there." Then the telephone service would be reinstated, and the inhabitants down South knew that the offensive was over.

Little wonder, then, how much information there was to be collected by any enemy agent who happened to be in the neighbour-

hood. It was a lax time, there was no strict control, the war was so near, out at sea, but nobody knew anything about it. The town of St. Raphaël was the French sea-plane base. I do not know whether, during the war years, the Germans paid very much attention to this base, but hardly was the ink dry on the various peace-making treaties, when the British began to be extremely interested in this Mediterranean base. In a small street at the back of the Madeleine Church in Paris, two young Englishmen opened a shop to sell English wireless sets. They employed a German who was naturalised British. One day the police came and took the three men away and closed the shop. The three men were eventually tried *in camera*. They were found to be British spies operating in France and they were sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

What, you may ask, were those two Englishmen and a third naturalised Britisher doing, spying in France; for whom were they spying? The answer is that they were spying for Great Britain. Looking backwards, it is all the more remarkable to think that just after the War one Ally should be spying on another; but for all the writer knows, there may have been French spies in England trying to do what these British spies were doing in France. What they were doing was something perfectly

legitimate. They were caught when they were trying to find out how many French 'planes were using the base at St. Raphaël. I may say that it is perfectly simple just for any person to go to St. Raphaël and look at the flying-field and count the 'planes on it. But this was far too simple for our British spies. In the first place, the police discovered that very little attempt had ever been made to sell wireless sets in the shop. Secondly, the defence that the spies were really British traders, fell apart when it was found they had not even taken the trouble to keep account books. Then again, they had their mail addressed to them in a neighbouring bar, and the letters were written in true William Le Queux style: in invisible ink.

Then, instead of going themselves and counting the 'planes in the sunny south, the young men went to Rouen, where in a dancing establishment they made the acquaintance of two or three young Frenchwomen of a certain profession, and engaged them to go south and do the counting. It was one of these women who gave information to the French police. Although, as I have said, at the end of the War the French had made up their minds to build bigger and better submarines, their war-time submarines were neither good nor big. I made a short trip in what was their

biggest submarine. It was called the *Andromaque*, and in the Captain's room I found a large signed photograph of Cécile Sorel, dressed as she was when she played the part of *Andromaque* at the *Comédie Française*. A war-time cruise in the Mediterranean in a submarine was an adventure. I was told to leave Toulon on a certain day in a fishing-boat. Those who know the Mediterranean only in its more benign mood can have no idea how cruel the waters can be. They were particularly cruel to me that winter's day when I went to keep a *rendez-vous* with a French submarine. The Allies had divided the Mediterranean up into squares, and certain ships had to look after certain squares. Sea-planes flew over the squares looking for enemy submarines, and Allied submarines cruised about in the squares looking for, I am not quite sure what.

In a stench of cabbage soup, I arrived in a rough sea at the place of appointment. The submarine rose to the surface, and I had to go overboard and jump and alight on the hull as best I might. I went over into this teeming sea and managed to land on the hull. Bare-footed sailors ran about this heaving steel mass with the sureness of experts walking the greasy pole. I made a safe, but quite undignified journey on hands and knees, keeping

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

as near as I could to the steel hawser until I reached the manhole. Here was a perpendicular steel ladder I was told to descend. I started, but when the Mediterranean heaved, I was thrown off the ladder and arrived with a smash at the foot. Then we dived and I was in another world.

The surface of the Mediterranean was rough; below the surface it was perfectly calm; in the side of the submarine was a window of thick plate glass. I looked through this window into such a fairyland as I have never seen before or since. It was like looking into a conservatory, but instead of flowers, there was marine vegetation and flitting fish. The deeper we dived, so changed the blue of the sea: emerald, turquoise, sapphire. The conservatory appeared to have a moving roof of glass. Fish swum close to the window and looked in. Strange forms of vegetation came past the window as I looked with eyes which never tired of gazing at this fascinating scene of beauty. There were tiny air bubbles, like flakes of snow. I was invited to drink champagne with the officers; I did, but I excused myself very soon and went back and glued my eyes to this window which looked into the Mediterranean, a most gorgeous sight.

Back-door Colonies

A P. & O. steamer moves slowly out of Tilbury Docks. Handkerchiefs flutter damply.

“Good-bye, Ma,” calls out a young voice from B Deck. “Good-bye, I’ll be back for Christmas—in two years.”

A little white steamer is preparing to move out of Marseilles. It is bound for the great French colony of Morocco. A woman in black stands on the dock. She looks composed, happy. A blast from the siren. The woman in black calls to her son:

“*Adieu, mon fils.* And don’t forget we await thee for lunch on Sunday.”

These back-door colonies of France and Italy and of pre-war Spain, how different they are to our own. How near.

France has thousands of miles of territory all at her back door: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia. Italy has Tripolitania, and thousands

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

of square miles of Lybia right at her back door across a strip of the Mediterranean.

Dotted about in the Mediterranean and in that backwater, the Adriatic, are small islands, some of which are inhabited by modern Robinson Crusoes. It was a Belgrade newspaper which set out to discover these islands and list them.

We are apt to think of the Mediterranean as either a well-known trade route, or else the middle of a number of sunny shores where one can spend delightful holidays. Yet, east of Greece and also along the shores of Dalmatia, there are hundreds of small islands, many quite uninhabited, and very many which have never been even explored. In another Mediterranean backwater, the Aegean Sea, the Greek Admiralty not so long ago discovered there were no fewer than four hundred small islands which had never been mapped. Just off many trade routes there are islands where people live contented lives, just catching fish. There are others who have gone to these islands to get away from troubles of the mainland. Civilisation was too much for them, so they went and looked for a little rocky island and there pitched their tent, or rather built a hut and lived and let live.

On one of those small rocky islands called Bran, which is off the coast of Dalmatia, there

is living a German named Paul Hartmann. Hartmann was in a ship which stranded. People put off from the mainland to rescue the crew; Hartmann shook his head. He said he knew when he was well off. He refused to go to the mainland, and on the island of Bran he has been ever since. He found logs and built a wooden hut. He obtained seeds from the mainland and made a vegetable garden. The sea provides him with an alternative diet. About twice a year, when Hartmann thinks that he needs a pair of trousers or a new comb, he puts some vegetables in a boat he has built and he rows to the mainland. Then he comes back home, as he calls it. Sometimes in the summer, tourists will go as far as his island. Although Hartmann does not mind relating his adventures, he does not seek civilisation, but if civilisation comes to him, he is quite polite to it.

On a small island called Itos, near the Greek island of Samos, there is living a Frenchman named Jean Duvivier who deserted from the French Army during the War and then went to Italy, and from Italy he went to his island when Italy entered the War.

Like many other Frenchmen, Duvivier was sentenced to death by court martial, but he was not present when sentence was passed; he was hundreds of miles away. When there

was an amnesty, Duvivier could have gone home if he wanted to, but he did not want to. He was content with his little Greek island, and there he is to-day.

A few miles from Itos is a tiny rocky island called Lataki, and on that island is another Frenchman, an artist named Coren. Coren and Duvivier visit each other very occasionally. Coren paints, and sells his pictures, sometimes on the mainland, but mostly to tourists who visit the little island.

On another small rocky island called Kichi is another German named Johann Wagner. On another island is a Dane called Karl Ericson who lives close to Dubrovnik, which is the famous pleasure resort on the Dalmatian coast. The Dane makes no bones about why he sought an island for himself; he did not like his wife and his wife's nagging. In sharp contrast to Wagner is the reason of another German for coming to a rocky island. His wife died and he was miserable. An Austrian husband and wife live on a small island off the coast of Dalmatia, but the Austrians lead a life far more civilised than the other Robinson Crusoes. They have built a small generating station, and they have quite a big wireless set and many books. The Austrians left Vienna because civilisation, as it is to-day, made them discontented. They meant, at

first, to go to the South Sea Isles, but their capital was small, so they paid their railway fare to the coast of Dalmatia where they say they have everything they require.

The log of the Mediterranean only contains the name of one Englishman, a man from London named Kennedy who lives in the Adriatic on the island of Logor. He has built himself a fine house with an English-looking garden. His wife lives there with him, but they do not like visitors.

The rocky islands of the Mediterranean and the neighbouring seas are not back-door colonies in the general sense of the word, but it is quite surprising to find that France, a country which has been the motherland of a large colonial Empire for a great number of years, has never exploited her colonies as Great Britain has done. Algeria is so close to France that vegetables and fruit could be brought across the Mediterranean very quickly and in fine condition. Yet, apart from a few carrots, a great many million bunches of grapes, and a few potatoes in the spring, nothing of very great importance comes out of Algeria. What is still more surprising is that so few Frenchmen go overseas to live in the French colonies. Fancy, a colony at your back door, a magnificent climate, a great vision of a peaceful future, a new civilisation,

everything is possible, but, perhaps owing to a lack of imagination, the French do not go to their colonies except to live the life of an office-keeper. It is quite well known that one Frenchman in every three is a Civil Servant; most of the Frenchmen who go to the North African back-door colonies are Civil Servants.

Spain had a small colony in Spanish Morocco, so close that it was visible with the naked eye. One could stand at Algeciras and look at the gleaming white mosques in Spanish Morocco. A few oranges which Spain did not want, a few heads of garlic, and Heaven knows Spain grew enough, and that is all that Spain ever took from her back-door colony.

The flying service which France built up between the homeland and North Africa brought the colonies within a few hours' distance from Marseilles. It would be quite possible for a French business man to fly to his estate in, say, Algeria, stay overnight and be back in Paris on the following day. Yet it would be very difficult to find many Frenchmen who would ever think of using the air to transact his business in a French colony. The Italians have for a long time looked with jealous eyes at the magnificent French colonies lying so close and yet so far.

—[*Back-Door Colonies*]—

The Italian, as has already been stated in this book, is not a pioneer. He prefers to step in where others have already trodden down the earth. But the Italian has his own back-door colony in Tripolitania. Perhaps if this strip of North Africa had been a possession of the French long years ago, it would to-day be a flourishing colony. The French are excellent colonists, few as they are, they work hard and they work well, and they get on well with the native population. The late Marshal Lyautey, who created modern Morocco, once told the present writer his method for achieving success in French colonial possessions. He was talking about the difficulties in India due to what he called over-education: allowing people to graduate from Indian universities and finding there were no jobs waiting for them. The Marshal said: "I would ask how many jobs there were going to be, and then I would say, so and so many students can graduate this year." Educationalists may not agree with this method, but France at least has achieved a measure of success by this method in her colonies which lie so close to the back doors which give on to the Mediterranean. Yet the onlooker must understand how envious people can be when they think they may achieve better results.

★ III ★

The Part England Plays

WHEN the great Spanish Empire collapsed, there was no other country ready or willing to replace Spain in the Mediterranean. The Armada was wrecked far from the Spanish shores of the Mediterranean, and in that wine-coloured sea pirates ruled supreme. Gibraltar was still a port, a Spanish port, and across the narrow straits the other pillar of Hercules, Tangiers, was in the hands of the Portuguese. The Spanish and Portuguese citadels stood like lonely sentinels, but they guarded the Mediterranean from nobody. Who wanted to step in and take over in succession to the Spaniards?

Oliver Cromwell, England's first dictator, toyed with the idea of seizing the narrow straits and holding them against all comers. We have the authority of Samuel Pepys, some time Secretary to the Admiralty, that Cromwell did intend to take Gibraltar somehow,

but in the end he did nothing. Some years passed and then Tangiers became British, because it was in the dowry of Catherine of Braganza.

In 1704 Gibraltar became British, after a military and naval engagement. The Dutch helped the English to capture Gibraltar. It was, this capture, merely an incident in the war against the French. Perhaps England did not even mean to hold it for ever. The French came and tried to drive off the British and the Dutch, but the French were defeated, and ever since the British flag has flown from the famous rock.

“As firm as the rock of Gibraltar” has become a saying in the English language. It has been used in all English-speaking countries, this blue-black slab of rock, in advertising goods which are meant to be enduring. Yet one wonders what the real naval and military value of Gibraltar is nowadays. In these times of long-distance guns, submarines and aeroplanes, one supposes that the value of the rock has dwindled perhaps more than 60 per cent. The masked batteries hidden in the rock could no doubt command the Straits to-day just as they did in the days of yore, but there is not anywhere where an aeroplane can land, although seaplanes can make use of the Mediterranean in the vicinity

of the all-powerful rock. Yet, as these lines are being written, questions are being asked in the House of Commons about the German batteries which are alleged to be trained from Spanish territory on the rock of Gibraltar. Gibraltar, in the mind of the writer, is something which stands for British prestige, not in the Mediterranean alone, but throughout the world. A narrow strip of land joins Gibraltar to Spain. Otherwise Gibraltar would just be one of the many islands with which Great Britain has girdled the earth. Travelling eastwards, Gibraltar, if we may count it as an island, is the first of many which form a safety belt for British sea supremacy. From Gibraltar we go to the island of Malta, and then to Cyprus; then just a short journey through the Suez Canal and we come to the island of Perim in the Red Sea. On again, rounding the sub-continent of India, and then we come to the Middle East where Great Britain has fortified the island of Penang, and then Singapore, and then we travel north a little and we come to Hong Kong.

Once upon a time, all these places were referred to as British coaling stations. That was in the spacious days when the British Navy steamed on British coal. Then came the moment when England made a doubtful change; from coal we switched to oil. Not

only were thousands of miners thrown out of work, but perhaps the safety of the British Navy and the Empire itself were put in jeopardy, because with a stroke of the pen coal was abandoned.

We have seen how important the Mediterranean is to France, partly because she must assure the safe passage of her black army, and also because she must be sure of being able to obtain petrol to run her mechanised army in time of war. The problem of Great Britain is not only oil, but food as well. It may be that she also will need once again to convoy men from Australia and New Zealand, and perhaps India, too. But it is oil and food which matter, because though we have stored vast quantities of oil in our former coaling bases, yet oil must come to England, and to the continent of Europe wherever British forces are fighting. True, Great Britain is better placed than France to obtain petrol from the United States, but the Neutrality Act passed during the Roosevelt régime makes the supply of oil uncertain; even if the Neutrality Act can be overcome, the danger from enemy submarines in the Atlantic is even more difficult to overcome. Oil will have to pass across the Mediterranean, and it behoves British interests to be sure that oil can cross in safety.

In many European Chancelleries it is said that England is only in the Mediterranean as a conqueror, as a colonial power, and that she has no historical right there whatsoever. Let us examine this point of view. Gibraltar is historical, but it is not because of its historical character that Great Britain is interested in it. It was captured, as we have seen, as a chance incident in a long-drawn-out campaign, but we have also seen that it was Oliver Cromwell who first had the vision of the importance Gibraltar might have for England.

Gibraltar itself is rather a dowdy sort of place. The inhabitants, who are known locally as "rock scorpions," speak English as their native tongue, but it is the sort of English one hears anywhere in the Levant; it is a sort of Mediterranean English. Life on the Rock is dominated by the Rock; it is only when one turns one's eyes seaward that one is not Rock conscious. The apes that clamber all over the Rock and gibber at your passage, are as local to Gibraltar as anything can be. Even to-day British officers and soldiers and sailors are there as strangers. The Spanish claim to the restoration of Gibraltar to the homeland occurs from time to time, but during the past hundred years or so, the cries and clamours have not mattered very much, yet with the coming of Franco, the propaganda has taken

on a new meaning. If Franco wins, there are two good reasons for believing that the propaganda for the return of Gibraltar to Spain will be intensified. The first reason is that if Germany and Italy continue to back up financially and materially the attempt to win Spain for Fascism, it is common sense that it is to the interest of the backers of Franco to demand that Gibraltar shall be ceded. Whether Great Britain will listen is a very different matter. Then again, supposing that Franco wins, and Italy and Germany fade out of the picture, Franco is fighting on a platform which demands that Spain shall be nationalistic up to the utmost degree. Even if Mussolini and Hitler do not demand that Gibraltar shall be dismantled by Great Britain and returned to Spain, it is quite sure that the nationalists of Spain will themselves demand that Gibraltar be returned to the motherland. This is a point of which one must never lose sight. Gibraltar, after being for hundreds of years a stronghold of Great Britain, and one of the pillars of her prestige, is now likely, in the not very distant future, to figure in another rôle.

Malta was taken by England, by the English Fleet, as a base in the Mediterranean at the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars. Previously, the island had been French, and it became so when Napoleon Bonaparte, on his way to

Alexandria, stopped off and captured the island from the Knights of Malta. Nelson's Fleet captured Malta quite easily. There was very little serious fighting, and the island surrendered after a blockade. This was in the year 1800. Then, after a period of occupation which did not exceed two years, England handed back the island to the Knights. The Knights did not hold their property for very long. Malta had been returned to them as a result of the Treaty of Amiens, but this Treaty was merely an interval between two wars. As soon as hostilities broke out again, there was a revolution on the island. The French believe that this revolution was provoked by British agents. The facts certainly do tend to the belief that the English Intelligence Service was active in those days. There was a revolt, that is quite true, and the mutineers demanded British protection from the Grand Master of the Knights of Malta. By a strange coincidence, ships of the British Fleet happened to be cruising in neighbouring waters and with the Fleet were military transports which anchored off the coast of Malta, and troops were landed to protect those who demanded English protection. England seized the island and has been there ever since. Until aviation became a great factor in military and naval defence and

offence, Malta was of paramount importance, lying as it does between the Suez Canal and the island of Sicily. Malta separated the eastern and the western Mediterranean. It was a strategic base of paramount importance. Also before the days of aviation, the British Fleet using Gibraltar as a base could have closed the western end of the Mediterranean and stopped any ships entering from the Atlantic. Malta controlled the other end, and was the naval base from which the Fleet operated in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. Thirty years ago, an English writer on naval affairs penned the following passage:

“Malta is the most powerful maritime fortress in the world. It is stronger than Gibraltar and Hong Kong, because it has no land frontiers to protect.”

In the days when England captured Gibraltar and Malta, France was the enemy. Now, since a very few years, as a matter of fact, France is a friend, but if there is another enemy in the Mediterranean, shall we be certain that these strategic islands are still of value?

In the summer of 1938, Mr. Geoffrey Lloyd, on behalf of the British Admiralty, visited Malta and pronounced his verdict: he said Malta was impregnable. Is it? At all events, the British Admiralty seemed to be in two minds about the matter some time before the

verdict was pronounced. There were flirtations with a scheme to make Cyprus the British second string in the eastern Mediterranean.

In 1877, during the Russo-Turkish war, the Tsar's Government wanted to prevent Turkey mobilising her Fleet, and it toyed with the idea of proclaiming the blockade of the Suez Canal. The Lord Derby of that time, the British Foreign Minister, sent for the Russian Ambassador in London and said to him that any attempt at blockading the Suez Canal would be considered by England as a threat to India, and, consequently, to Great Britain herself. The Tsar changed his mind about the blockade. The next year, England did a deal with the Sultan of Turkey. The Congress of Berlin had been summoned, and England promised Turkey to support her there in exchange for the authorisation from the Sultan for England to occupy Cyprus.

Cyprus was a potential naval base, either for action against Egypt, or for preventing a blockade of the Suez Canal. England took Turkey under her wing so that Russia should not have Constantinople. Soundings were taken, but it was found that it was not possible, except at very great expense, to build ports in the island of Cyprus. England then turned her mind wholeheartedly to Egypt, and made Egypt a solid base for the protection of the

Suez Canal. Work in Cyprus was dropped, but when England went to war with Germany, Cyprus was annexed as a Crown colony. In 1937 there was an agitation in England to fortify Cyprus, but the matter still seems to be hanging fire, although Cyprus may become at any moment a very important factor in the Mediterranean.

During the past six or seven years there have been frequent troubles among the population of Malta. The people, as Italian as they may appear, are, for the most part, truly loyal to Great Britain, yet agitation from the mainland has stirred up troubles which have from time to time caused real anxiety in Whitehall. There was at one time the question of the Constitution, and another time there was the language difficulty, but these questions have been dealt with, and at the time of writing, Malta is tranquillised, yet one does not feel that Italy will leave Malta alone. In the early days of Fascist propaganda, when Mussolini started to claim Nice and Savoy, he also claimed Malta as one of the brightest jewels in the Italian Crown.

Cyprus has a population which is largely, if not almost entirely, Greek. A very pleasant tobacco is grown there, and a scent known as Chypre is fairly well known as a Cyprus product. But even Cyprus has its troubles.

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

There has been agitation there, and from time to time the young men of Cyprus have made much noise and caused a great deal of commotion which did not lead anywhere in particular.

It is a wonder that nobody has yet thought of making Cyprus a great holiday resort. Just as the coast of Dalmatia has been turned into an attractive and luxurious resort, so could Cyprus be treated in the same way. The climate is salubrious, the scenery most picturesque, and one can easily visualise gambling in beautiful casinos on the sunny shores of this most pleasant island.

It has been cynically suggested that Great Britain might as well hoist the Union Jack in Monte Carlo and annex the Principality of Monaco, and mount guns on Charlie's Mount, and turn this sunny little principality, shady as well as sunny in some ways, into another British Mediterranean possession. Needless to say, this suggestion made in a spirit of rather bitter fun comes from people who look upon England as an interloper in the Mediterranean. It has been suggested, as we have seen, that England is using the Mediterranean as an interloper, but Whitehall would reply that Great Britain is in the Mediterranean solely for the purpose of keeping clear the roads. On the north-west frontier of India, to make a big

jump for a moment, there is the Khyber Pass, and the rule of the road there is that no matter what happens, no matter what tribes are fighting which, the road must be kept open. That rule is also the rule of the maritime road of the Mediterranean. No matter what happens, British commercial vessels must be free to pass to and fro through the Mediterranean. Nothing else matters.

French chauvinists point to Palestine and Arabia to show that Great Britain has no purity of purpose in the Mediterranean. They point to those two former Turkish provinces and say that England is seeking more conquests; she is seeking more territory to tear off. Yet, if one examines the question with an unbiased mind, one finds that Great Britain is in Palestine and also has Arabia under her wing, for the purpose of making the Mediterranean more secure than before for British commerce. Here it is necessary to pause for a moment and examine the Italian question from the purely British point of view, leaving out what interests France or any other Mediterranean country may have in the Franco-Italian quarrels. What is Great Britain quarrelling with Italy about; why is there a row on? Perhaps we have been so used to this continual Anglo-Italian dog-fight that we have forgotten how the row started, and, while we

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

are examining this point, is there really a quarrel?

Once again to quote the French chauvinists, England is a *parvenue* in the Mediterranean. In the sense that England had no territory with which she was born, as one may say, England is a *parvenue*. England went into the Mediterranean as a conqueror; but not just to create colonies. The Crown colonies of Malta and Cyprus are just about worthless. Gibraltar produces absolutely nothing at all, it purchases every commodity it needs. Malta and Cyprus can feed themselves, but the goods they provide, the raw materials they send to Great Britain, do not matter a jot. They are both a part of that over-used phrase: "Outposts of Empire." They were coaling bases and now they are submarine and aeroplane bases. We need not be hypocrites about that, but if Great Britain in a moment of mental aberration withdrew from Malta and Cyprus, do you not think that Italy would very quickly step into British shoes?

Before Mussolini began to build up an Empire, relations between Great Britain and his country were perfectly normal. With the aid of France, Great Britain had jockeyed Italy out of her title to colonial territory as her price for coming into the War, yet I do not suppose that 5 per cent of the population of Italy

—[*The Part England Plays*]—

remembered anything about that matter. Just after the War, President Wilson was very unpopular, but that was a passing phase, and British unpopularity, which was not on the same par as President Wilson's, was also very soon forgotten. Then came the war in Abyssinia, and England's strange behaviour. Great Britain was like a circus performer trying to ride two horses simultaneously. Horse number one was the League of Nations; horse number two was British interests in the Mediterranean. So long as the two horses galloped in perfect union, Great Britain was able to stand with one foot on either saddle and keep her balance upright. Then horse number one gained a few inches in front of horse number two. Great Britain shows no outward sign of unbalance, but privately makes an attempt to rein in horse number one. Horse number one shows no sign of being reined in, but makes another attempt to get in front of horse number two. Then Britain has to try and make horse number two, British interests in the Mediterranean, run closer to the League of Nations, horse number one.

Let us drop circus metaphor and come down to brass tacks. The "Peace Ballot" held in the United Kingdom showed that there were several million people who took the League of Nations completely seriously. They were

the idealists of England. They were potential voters in the next General Election, and the Baldwin Government had to do something about them. Abyssinia could obviously not be thrown to the barking dogs of war. It was quite obvious, too, that the dogs would have to be doped, otherwise they might start to bite as well as to bark. One is reminded of the intellectual Chinaman who was dining one night with a friend in London. The Chinaman took a taxi out to his friend's house in Hampstead, and as he opened the garden gate an ugly-looking dog began to bark. The Englishman came down the garden path to welcome his Chinese guest and called out to him: "Don't be afraid; don't you know our proverb that a barking dog never bites?"

"Yes," replied the Chinaman. "You know the proverb, I know the proverb, but does the dog know the proverb?"

In fact, the Italian dogs of war cared as little about the British idealists as a fish does about an apple, or a donkey a strawberry. Nevertheless, the dogs had to be doped, and the best dope that Mr. Stanley Baldwin could find was a speech. Sir Samuel Hoare made that speech, and he made a very pretty speech indeed. He faced the Assembly and was full of sticky sentiment. He told the Italians how much he, personally, loved them. He reminded

them that he had fought on their front during the War. Then we had M. Pierre Laval, who was in a position more difficult than that of Sir Samuel Hoare. M. Laval also had to dope the Italians, but he had previously stroked these Italian barking dogs. M. Laval had been to Rome to see Mussolini and the twain had foregathered forthrightly and had got to like one another. Madame Geneviève Tabouis, who accompanied M. Laval with several other French journalists on his visit to Rome, gives an amusing account of how matters stood on the eve of the departure. Both M. Laval and Mussolini thought they had made a big killing. Laval had gone to Rome after many false steps had been made by his predecessors at the Quai d'Orsay. Aristide Briand had played with the idea of going; Louis Barthou had first thought of going, and had then refused to go, and then had gone with M. Laval. M. Laval, perhaps bewitched by his *vis-à-vis*, the Duce, had promised more than he intended. Subsequently when he had withdrawn from the charmed circle, he wrote a rather foolish letter to Mussolini asking Mussolini to write back a letter which he, M. Laval, could show his colleagues to prove to them that he had not made promises he should not have made. M. Laval was not at all satisfied with the reply Mussolini sent him, yet we have Sir

Samuel Hoare and M. Pierre Laval talking to the Assembly of the League of Nations, but the Assembly was not amused.

Something else had to be done. In the usual Geneva manner, that is to say a very hole-and-corner manner, Sir Samuel and M. Laval got together and evolved a plan which was to tear off part of Abyssinia and fling it to the Italian dogs of war, but the poor dogs got none. Sir Samuel had forgotten those who took part in the majority vote of the League of Nations Union, the idealists who voted on the peace ballot. Mr. Stanley Baldwin had to stand up and make a speech, and at the outcome he had to sacrifice his Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, not to the dogs of war, but to the idealists of Great Britain. It was a sorry session.

The abortive Hoare-Laval pact to "save Abyssinia" was a thing of the past. Something else had to be done. There was no dope for the dogs, but they had to be given the whip. The English and French statesmen went into a huddle, as they say in the United States, and out came sanctions, not as a gift of the gods, but as a gift to Geneva.

It is possible, and indeed probable, that sanctions could have been enforced and Mussolini's bluff called, and the war in Abyssinia stopped. It would have been necessary to

have saved Mussolini's face, but even that could have been done. Sanctions are now an old story. We had better forget it while we can, but so long as we think or write about Anglo-Italian relations, we cannot forget that the part Britain played in imposing sanctions was the real cause of the quarrel with Italy. One may say that sanctions having failed, and Italy having won a victory, she could have been both forgiving and forgetting, and have agreed that an unfortunate chapter in Italian relations with Great Britain could now be closed. That might have been done, but there is a proverb which avers that appetite comes with eating. The dogs of war had tasted blood and they liked it. That is why there is a quarrel between London and Rome, and that quarrel is one which cannot be patched up by sending either personal letters to Mussolini or the passing of notes of friendship or pacts called "Gentlemen's Agreements" between the two capitals. As soon as that much is recognised as being true, the quicker will the breach be healed and the sooner will there be a prospect of peace in the Mediterranean, if not elsewhere in this much troubled world.

We come now to the beginning of the last chapter of the present episode of the Mediterranean. In July 1936, I left the shores of the Mediterranean to go to Russia. I travelled

across France and intended to go by way of Hull. In Boulogne I met Señor Largo Caballero and Señor Alvarez del Vayo; they had been on a visit to London. A few days later, when I was on a ship in the Baltic, the ship's wireless reported the outbreak of a revolution in the Spanish Republic. I have already referred in this book to del Vayo as a journalist. The first Republican Government had appointed him Ambassador to Mexico City. He served a term of service there, and then he was appointed to go with a League of Nations Commission to try and settle the war between Bolivia and Paraguay. The day I met him in Boulogne, his service was over. He was returning to journalism. He talked to me of the possibility of representing an English paper in Madrid. I recall this fact now because it shows how little was known in Spain of the civil war which was being prepared by enemies of the Republic. Alvarez del Vayo, subsequently acting Prime Minister of Spain, was on that summer's day two years ago intending to return to journalism. During our talk in Boulogne, del Vayo complained of the little interest England took in Spanish affairs; he told me of the ignorance he had found in high places. In the light of the world-shaking events which were to occur within the next few days, that conversation was almost

—[*The Part England Plays*]—

historical. Great Britain accepted the Spanish Republic. She could hardly do anything else. It was a duly elected Government; it is still so to-day. Yet when King Alfonso fell, the real interest that Great Britain had in Spain evaporated.

Ex-King Alfonso had separated from the Queen. The ex-King lived a wandering life on the continent of Europe; the ex-Queen had returned to the home of her childhood: England. Yet ex-Queen Ena was very loyal to the ex-King. Ex-King Alfonso was not popular in Court circles in England. He was not invited to attend the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Kent. Ex-Queen Ena refused to attend the ceremony unless the ex-King was invited. I mark these points to underline the situation as it was in Whitehall when General Franco launched his offensive against Spain in the summer of 1936.

British Intelligence Service, usually so good, and during the World War so magnificent in its work in Spain, seems to have fallen down on its job in 1936. General Franco launched his offensive and nothing was known concerning it in the British Foreign Office.

Italian anger against England, propaganda-fed, was smouldering. Mussolini knew that neither Great Britain nor France would call upon the League of Nations to intervene in

the conflict, no matter what he did. Sanctions were not so long out of the way. Mussolini, too, knew that all the weaknesses of the League of Nations had been exposed to the world. He had nothing to fear from Geneva, so much was certain. Here was a Heaven-sent chance to test out the strength of the British Empire, and at the same time to continue to build the second Roman Empire.

Would Mussolini have embarked on the Spanish adventure alone? If Hitler had shaken his head, what would have happened: would Mussolini have gone in as he did? Yes, I think he would. Far better, of course, it was for Berlin to assist in the rape of Spain, but the assistance of Germany was not of vital import to Rome. The revolt, as first presented by the British newspapers, was a trial of strength between the Spanish public and a military force which was reported to be favourably disposed towards the restoration of the Spanish Monarchy. That much the British public understood. Then the British newspapers of the Left and the Right began to present the news in different fashion. It was holiday-time and the British public was ignorant of the so-called non-essentials of the conflict. The British newspaper reader who opened his newspaper on the sea front wanted to know if Madrid had fallen. Then he wanted

to know who was winning. That was right enough, but the fighting began to be clouded by masses of propaganda. The Spanish Government was referred to as a Red Government when, as a matter of fact, there was not a single Communist among its members. Franco was represented as a sort of knight in armour riding to battle for the Roman Catholic cause, and to establish law and order in Spain. It was represented to millions of British readers that British interests were not affected by the war in Spain.

There are always two dangerous ways of treating the British public. One method is to tell it nothing, and the other is to tell it lies. Very little of truth about the war in Spain ever reached the public through newspapers, but a great deal of it did reach the public through the numerous books which have been published during the progress of the war. Here again, matters merely muddled the minds of the reading public. There were violent outcries that the Reds, as they were called, were a bunch of cut-throats, and violent outcries from others that Franco's fiends were the real villains of the piece.

Mussolini must almost have laughed with glee. Matters were working out so much better than he had ever anticipated. Those who believed the knight-in-armour version would

stomach the story that thousands of brave volunteers were flocking from all over Europe, principally from Italy and Germany, to fight to overcome international Bolshevism. Of course, the Jews were at the bottom of it all. Nobody happened to call attention to the fact that the man who financed the revolution in the beginning, Juan March, is said to be a Jew.

In 1933 a book was published in London which was called *The Spanish Republic*. It was a survey of two years of progress, and the writer signed himself "Anonymous." Based on documentary evidence, the book purported to show that the Spanish Republic was an utter failure. Here is an enlightening paragraph: ". . . such is the cause of the profound failure of the Republic. The intellectuals who desired its advent are the first to denounce its deeds. The middle and lower classes that plotted for its establishment now loathe it, or want it in another form. It is no longer a national régime, but simply a coterie of political climbers who hold power against the will of the people. Proof of this is not difficult to obtain; we have only to remember the extraordinary precautions that are adopted every time an outing is made by the President or his Ministers. Like their Russian colleagues, the members of the Spanish Government live

protected by a wealth of safeguards that were unknown under the Monarchy, notably during Primo de Rivera's régime. The late Dictator used to walk unescorted in the streets of Madrid, even in carnival time, when they were thronged by crowds who cheered or chaffed him good-humouredly."

Perhaps on the whole it is better that the author of this passage did sign himself "Anonymous." Nothing more misleading was ever written in the early days of the Spanish Republic. Yet even those who were not particularly interested in Spain, but who happened to read this book, must have agreed that it was time the Spanish Republic was overthrown and the Monarchy restored. I do not believe, however, that was the general opinion of the man in the street, who likes to see fair play. Yet, because of the poisonous propaganda which was poured into England and the United States by both participants in the so-called civil war in Spain, neither the man in the street in Great Britain nor in the United States had a fair chance, for a very long time, of understanding what was really happening in Spain.

Directors of Great Britain's foreign policy, and more particularly the Mediterranean policy, were being pressed by certain British organs to recognise Franco's Government, just

as it had been recognised by Berlin and Rome. It was at one time a matter of days before such recognition was made, but consequently wiser counsels prevailed, and at the time of writing, Great Britain has an agent in Burgos, Franco's headquarters, but actual recognition of this insurgent Government is still quite a long way away. Frightened by the failure of our earlier Mediterranean policy, the British Foreign Office almost for the first twelve months of the war in Spain, seemed too frightened to adopt any positive policy, because it might annoy Mussolini. In the House of Commons, the Government spokesman, replying to questions, was pressed to answer whether it was a fact, yes or no, that Italian soldiers were fighting in Spain as conscripted soldiers and not as volunteers. The answers to these pertinent questions were always unsatisfactory. Those who like to split hairs were not too displeased, but the people who like to know that a spade is a spade and not a shovel, were most displeased. Yet the British public did not know that the Foreign Office refused to be parted from Italy, not the Italy of Mussolini, but the Italy of pre-Mussolini days, the Roman Catholic Italy with which a large section of the London Foreign Office had a spiritual affinity. It was difficult, very difficult indeed, to ride these two horses

—[*The Part England Plays*]—

simultaneously. Either England was pro-Italian or she was not. It was impossible to be pro-Italian and anti-Mussolini. Meanwhile, British prestige in the Mediterranean ebbed slowly away. Long before British ships were being bombed from the air, they were being attacked by submarines. For a long time, the London Foreign Office played at being an ostrich. Perhaps not so much an ostrich as some sort of strange maritime animal; it buried its head in the Mediterranean, but closed its eyes and refused to look at the nationality of the submarines which were attacking British ships.

Years and years have passed since there were pirates in the Mediterranean, but now, like the clown in the Harlequinade, they could shout "Here we are again." British ships summer cruising in the Mediterranean had an extra thrill for their passengers. At a moment's notice the itinerary was changed because of submarines. Whose submarines, Italian submarines? Oh, hush, please don't say Italian. They are just unknown submarines, perhaps they belong to some nation whose name is not on any map. Perhaps not.

Meanwhile, England was divided into two camps: the Red and the anti-Red. You paid your penny and you took your choice. It was not a question of "penny plain, tuppence

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

coloured," you were Red with one penny and anti-Red with the other penny. In one section of the Press you had nuns being raped, priests tortured, churches sacked and pillaged. In another section of the Press you had Franco's army shooting men and women without trial. You had them marching into Spanish towns, tearing the shirts off the backs of all males and looking at their shoulders. If there was a mark on the flesh which might have come from carrying a rifle, then up against the wall and a volley.

The second summer came round, and Britain looked like she was going to be dragged into this Mediterranean war, neck and crop. Then came that blessed word, Non-Intervention. For the sake of Non-Intervention we lay down on our stomachs in the mud and allowed Mussolini and Hitler to walk across our prostrated bodies. A clever stroke of diplomacy known as the Nyon Agreement brought Italy in and stopped submarine piracy in the Mediterranean. The newspaper reader may have wondered how it was that on one day unknown submarines were sinking British ships in the Mediterranean, and as soon as Italy had signed the document the unknown submarines returned to their unknown ports.

Gone were the days and gone were the memories of Lord Nelson and Trafalgar, of

Nelson's ships sweeping the Mediterranean clean of all threats to British merchantmen, homeward or outward bound across this dangerous sea. Submarine warfare was over, but war in the air was about to begin. From the skies, bombs rained down on British ships. There rose then another long period of hair splitting. The British ships were not British ships; the British ships were foreign ships registered as British ships. So far, so bad.

If those former Greek-owned ships and other foreign-owned ships had no right to be registered as British ships, why allow them to do so? Surely it would have been perfectly easy to stop this practice. Yet, if they were British ships, if they sailed under the British flag, the Italian and German bombs which rained down on them were rained on the British flag and not on the Greek flag or the flags of any other nation.

Great Britain had already signed an agreement with Italy. It was known as a "Gentlemen's Agreement". Why it was necessary to label it as such, passes the imagination, but in any case it is not important, because the agreement was abortive. Then Mussolini declared in no uncertain manner that he did not like Mr. Eden. Therefore Mr. Eden had to be sacrificed. That was the second Secretary for Foreign Affairs that the British Government

sacrificed on the altar of Rome. We had already parted company with Sir Samuel Hoare, it will be remembered.

Then, after twelve months of arguments in London, the so-called Non-Intervention Committee drafted out an agreement, which was supposed to put an end to the foreign intervention in the war in Spain. I will end this chapter with a brief résumé of what has happened since that agreement was reached. The agreement, known as the British Agreement, suggested proportionate withdrawal of foreign soldiers, namely an equal percentage of either army. The Government of Spain accepted the British proposal almost immediately. Franco made no reply whatsoever. Public opinion in England became restive, and Sir Robert Hodgson, the British agent in Burgos, was instructed to ask Franco to give a reply. He took five weeks to draft his reply, and it was received in London in the middle of August 1938. The reply was so involved that it took a whole day to have it translated into English. Franco, or his masters, replied to the British proposal for the withdrawal of a proportionate number of foreign troops from each side with a counter-suggestion that each side should "surrender" 10,000 troops. Ten thousand was the official estimate of the number of foreigners fighting

—[*The Part England Plays*]—

in the International Brigade on the side of the Spanish Government. When 10,000 men were withdrawn from either side, that would leave Franco with about 30,000 Italian troops and 10,000 German technicians.

While Franco was drafting his reply to the proposal set out by the Non-Intervention Committee, reports reached London and Paris that Italy, despite her promise, was still sending men and munitions to rebel Spain. The Earl of Perth, the British Ambassador, was absent on leave, but the British Chargé d’Affaires, Sir Noel Charles, went to call on Count Ciano, Mussolini’s son-in-law and Foreign Minister, and asked him if the allegation was true. Count Ciano took a little time and then replied that there was no truth in the report, and he made the counter-allegation that France, despite the fact that, to please Great Britain, she had closed the Pyrenees frontier, was sending munitions to the Government’s side. He added that if Italy had sent any fresh equipment and stores, it was merely to replace the stores which were used up.

There I must leave the question. There is no news. No news, so they say, is good news, but one of these days, one must be forced to ask the question: What is the part Britain is going to play in the Mediterranean?

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

It is not necessary to wave the flag. For centuries the British flag has been flown with honour across the Mediterranean and peace as well as trade has followed that flag. During the past two years, British policy in the Mediterranean has been difficult to understand. It is most important that British policy should be understood, not only in Europe, but also in the United States, particularly in the United States. Because Great Britain failed when she backed the policy of sanctions, there is no reason for her failing to keep up her end in the Mediterranean. It is said that nothing succeeds like success, and as a pendant to that platitude, one might say that there is nothing that fails like failure.

★ IV ★

Africa on the Mediterranean

THREE continents, Europe, Africa and Asia, meet on the Mediterranean. All three continents, in so far as their Mediterranean shores are concerned, at the moment of writing are in a state of turbulence, but Africa is mild compared with the other two continents. Theoretically, Morocco is merely a French Protectorate. In reality, it is the keystone of the French Colonial Empire. This French Protectorate, washed by the Mediterranean, more than twice and a half as big as Great Britain, is yet a back-door colony of France. Despite its size, the total population of French Morocco is about two-thirds the population of greater London. Yet the wealth of Morocco is not even known for certain. It is alleged to abound in minerals, even gold and silver; it is certain that there is a quantity of manganese, as well as tin and copper and coal and iron. Being so rich, it is natural that

Morocco should attract the envious eyes of those who possess no colonies worth the name, and of those who possess no colonies at all. Mention the name Massermann to a French colonial in Morocco and he will look at you with eyes of suspicion. Massermann is, in Morocco, the name which conjures up German intrigue. Long years ago, long before the World War, the firm of Massermann was penetrating into Morocco. Economic troubles have come to this French Protectorate just as they have come to other parts of this turbulent world. Yet Morocco has been less recipient to these troubles than other better civilised and more advanced countries. The Arabs and the Berberes are, for the most part, a simple people, but mixed with these sons of Islam are a number of other races. There are Greeks and Italians and Jews, and a sprinkling of still others as well. For several years, foreign nations have been trying to stir up trouble in Morocco. There was a certain amount of unsettled feeling owing to lack of work. Lack of employment has always existed in Morocco. It is due, principally, to the fact that France has never fully exploited her colony. It is marvellously organised, of that there can be no question whatsoever; it is a paradise for tourists, for one thing; there are marvellous roads, good and inexpensive hotels, but some-

how Morocco does not attract a very big percentage of the travelling public. In Morocco, as well as in all other parts of the Islamic world, the Arab himself is a traveller. He never stays very long at one job. He likes to travel without any particular objective. He goes from one town to another, and sits in the bazaar and sips his coffee and talks. The Arabs then, and the Berberes, for the matter of that, were excellent agents for foreign propaganda. Hitler's famous book, *Mein Kampf*, was translated into Arabic and free copies circulated in the bazaars. This was in 1937.

Following the distribution of the book, Arab speakers, hired by German agents, began to harangue small crowds in the bazaars and stir them up against the Jews. For the past two years there have been more or less serious anti-Jewish riots. It was pointed out that the Jews were ruining the Arabs in Palestine. There are in Morocco, as well as in other parts of French North Africa, some Jewish moneylenders. When bad times came to Morocco, Arab landowners did borrow money from these moneylenders.

"Why pay these swine?" asked the German-inspired Arab agents. It did not require very much work to stir up trouble. Jewish shops were robbed and the owners beaten and turned out into the street.

The French dealt with these riots actively and thoroughly. They showed the Arabs that the Jews were not the unscrupulous leeches that the German agents said they were. Gradually, tension relaxed, but Italy had not finished with the Arabs. Mussolini had declared himself, like the Kaiser before him, the protector of Islam. Italian agents, who were underselling the French in the Moroccan markets, preached that better times were coming when Italy had taken Morocco. The French people were said to be too weak to hold on to the colony; look, exclaimed the agent, look at the mighty Mussolini, look how he has conquered Abyssinia, and so will he conquer the remainder of the Mediterranean when he wills. Look at England, unable to do anything to check the ever-growing strength of Mussolini.

The Arabs went back to their bazaars and muttered among themselves. The Moorish scene was darkened with the clouds of discontent.

The post-War history of French North Africa has been not only a picturesque one, but an exceedingly chequered history. There have been times when it looked as if the whole of North Africa might break out into flames of revolt. Ever since the moment when the German cruiser *Panther* dropped anchor at

Agadir, and France and Germany nearly went to war over this colony, the Arabs in Morocco were said to be waiting for the day when France would either develop Morocco or else get out. France, however, by her wisdom, has shown the Arabs that she has not the faintest intention of getting out, and, moreover, she is in Morocco for ever.

France may be said to have bartered Egypt for Morocco. The dawn of the twentieth century saw France afraid of an Anglo-German alliance. That would have meant France left with one ally: Russia. And France knew quite well the weaknesses of that ally. It came to the ears of the Quai d'Orsay that the British Government, in negotiating a treaty with Berlin, was prepared to give Germany land on the Mediterranean. Morocco, then an unknown, unmapped, undeveloped country, was to be given away in return for German friendliness. As soon as France knew what was afoot, she rushed into Morocco and began to dig herself in. The policy of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain might have succeeded if Kaiser Wilhelm had not overstepped the mark. Mr. Chamberlain wanted German friendliness, but the Kaiser wanted a big Navy, and Mr. Chamberlain could not "see" that.

Instead of Germany getting Morocco, France

brought off a brilliant diplomatic *coup* in London, and was able to say that Morocco was hers. In 1904, France guaranteed to Great Britain that she would no longer intrigue or interfere, and Great Britain thereupon gave her agreement to French colonial expansion in North Africa. Madrid and Rome both agreed that France should have Morocco. There was subsequently another agreement which divided Morocco up into zones. France took charge of the third zone, which was the most important, for it covered the whole of the western or Atlantic frontier, and this incorporated the biggest and most important cities of Morocco. Spain obtained a little fringe of land on the Mediterranean, and opposite to the homeland. As a matter of accuracy, Spain already had two small towns, Ceuta and Melilla, in the zone which Great Britain and France allowed her.

The other zone was much more intricate, it was Tangiers, not much of a place although extremely picturesque, but there were 225 square miles of territory which formed the hinterland of Tangiers, and was to become what it is to-day, a sort of No-Man's-Land, although theoretically it was internationalised. Having bartered Morocco for Egypt, Paris did another deal, this time with Rome; Italy was given Libya, and it was only a

long time afterwards that she discovered she had nothing very valuable in exchange for something of the very greatest importance.

Germany saw that she had been jockeyed out of North Africa, principally by a dry little Frenchman, Delcassé, who was French Foreign Minister. Germany, in the person of the Kaiser, was furious. He wrote to his uncle, Edward VII, to complain that France was doing him wrong. King Edward, as is very well known, was not very friendly towards his nephew; King Edward liked France and the French. Tangiers had by now become the scene of the greatest intrigue Europe had known since 1869, or rather in the years just previous to 1869 when the Suez Canal was being built. We're now in 1904, when German agents were forcing the Sultan of Morocco to scream aloud for assistance against France. Nobody took any notice, and in 1905 the Kaiser Wilhelm went to Tangiers. Von Kühlmann, who was the German Chargé d'Affaires in Tangiers, had to go out to meet his august master who had had an extremely stormy passage in more senses than one. There was no harbour in Tangiers in 1905. The Kaiser looked at Africa. He saw the beauties of the scene, but he was terribly seasick. Von Kühlmann was also in a similar plight. He had to put out in a

little rowing-boat, and climb up the companionway of the Kaiser's ship, drenched to the skin, a very sorry sight indeed. The Kaiser took him into his cabin and closed the door. After a little while, a very uneasy looking military officer came up on deck and said that the Kaiser had ordered him to go ashore in the rowing-boat. There is an expression vulgarly known as "Trying it on the dog." The German officer was the dog. The Kaiser thought that if his Aide-de-Camp was able to go and return in safety, he might risk his august personage. The military officer made the journey in safety, and then the Kaiser went ashore. In full uniform, Kaiser Wilhelm rode through the street of the African city. He did not like Africa. The Sultan's uncle received him in state, but nothing he could say or do would pacify the Kaiser. He went, he saw, but he was conquered by Africa. And never again did he want to set eyes on it.

The stories of the Kaiser's farcical visit to Africa amused the Edwardian world. Yet the fate of Morocco was still undecided. The German Foreign Office had not given up hope of wrecking the French agreement.

The Sultan of Morocco was told to go on with his demands for assistance against France. The Germans were successful in summoning

the Conference of Algeciras which brought together Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia, Sweden, Austria, Hungary, Belgium, Portugal, and the United States. France at this conference was put in the dock, and Germany was the Prosecuting Attorney. France had to tell the Court how she proposed to carry out financial and fiscal reforms. Germany pressed for equal rights with France in Morocco, but Great Britain stood staunchly at the side of the prisoner in the dock. On paper, Germany may have obtained satisfaction, but in fact, France was given a piece of engraved parchment which gave her the rights she had herself demanded. The prisoner in the dock was honourably acquitted and presented with the freedom of Morocco.

Germany, however, could not leave Morocco alone. Not quite two years after the Conference of Algeciras, civil war broke out between the Sultan of Morocco and his brother. France rushed troops to Casablanca, and Germany made a protest to the Powers saying that her own commercial and economic interests were being harmed. Matters drifted on for another two years, and in 1911 there was more unrest in Morocco, and this time French troops marched into Fez, the capital, surrounded the Sultan's Palace and remained

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

in occupation. Students of world politics at this time were puzzled because Germany at this moment, instead of opposing French military action, herself asserted that she would, in certain instances, have the right to intervene to protect her own interests in Morocco. On the 1st of July 1911, German intentions became clear. The cruiser *Panther* came down the Atlantic and anchored off Agadir. France and Germany, as I have said, almost went to war.

Once again Great Britain stood beside France, and France not only avoided war with Germany, but she was able to reassert her interests in Morocco, and at the same time buy off Germany by agreeing to Germany obtaining further territories: Cameroons and the Ubanghi. Spain was not bothersome, and Italy was having a little trouble over Tripolitania, and she was not anxious at that moment to hinder France because she saw that the conquest of the African natives was no easy task. The following year, in 1912, the French Protectorate over Morocco was formerly recognised by the Treaty of Fez. But other Mediterranean troubles were in store.

Tangiers now comes again into our picture of Africa on the Mediterranean. Once upon a time, there was a very delightful uncrowned

“King of Tangiers.” His name was Mr. Walter Harris, and he was the correspondent of *The Times*. He may have had, as he was repeatedly alleged to have had, certain British interests at heart, but the marvellous personality of Mr. Harris endeared him as the friend and comforter of all visiting foreigners. One merely had to set foot in Tangiers and smile and say “Monsieur Harris,” and at once one was taken either to the café where Monsieur Harris was to be found having his shoes shined while he sipped coffee, or else to the Arab house in which he lived in mediæval splendour and great content. When a native of Tangiers had any troubles, he took them as a matter of course to Mr. Walter Harris. Mr. Walter Harris was the final arbitrator of a matter which might have led to a grave breach of the peace between Spain and France. There was, and perhaps is to-day, a Spanish cinema and a French cinema on the same side of the street. The two cinemas were separated by an alley so narrow that one could span it by stretching out one’s arms. The proprietor of the French cinema, a Frenchman naturally, one morning found that his advertising posters, placed at the corner of the alley, had been torn down by vicious hands. The angry Monsieur replaced the posters. Next morning they were torn down again. Anger, gesticulation,

more anger, up with new posters, and there they were, down again the next morning. What to do? Monsieur strongly suspected the Señor just across the street who no doubt was jealous of the success of Monsieur's beautiful cinema. He was so angry, this French cinema proprietor, that he intended to assault his Spanish neighbour. Then friends intervened, and Monsieur was taken in the presence of Mr. Walter Harris, who, as I have said, was having his shoes shined and sipping his morning cup of coffee. Mr. Walter Harris listened with both ears to the Frenchman's story of woe. He said he would investigate.

That night, wrapped in an Arab *burnous*, Mr. Walter Harris kept watch at the corner of the alley. The night was a typical African night, so Mr. Harris eventually told the present writer. The stars shone bright and it was very cold, because Africa is just a cold country with a very hot sun. Just as Mr. Harris was thinking of going home, he heard the patter of feet, and up the alley came a small herd of goats. They reached the corner between the two cinemas, and eight goats with a single mind turned to the Frenchman's posters and started to eat the paper. They liked the paste the Frenchman used, so much. Their horns, not vicious hands, tore the posters,

and Mr. Harris smiled as he padded softly back to his bed. The next morning he summoned the Spaniard and the Frenchman to his presence in the café where his shoes were shone and he drunk his coffee. Peace was made over a pot of paste.

Germany's grip on North Africa continued until the World War. During the War, there were spasmodic attempts to stir up trouble, but nothing very serious occurred. Then the Treaty of Versailles erased the name of Germany from the Treaty of Algeiras, and that closed the German entry into the African scene.

Italy was what one may term the spiritual successor of Germany on the northern shores of Africa. In 1923 there was a Conference in Paris to consider the future of Tangiers. Italy wished to attend that Conference, but M. Poincaré, who was Prime Minister at that time, stood, lawyer-like, on the Franco-Italian agreement of 1904. This agreement, as we have seen, made Italy renounce her interests in Morocco. The real reason why a Conference was held in Paris in 1923 was because, just outside Tangiers, a small war was in progress. At the beginning of this book, I named the Arab chieftain, Abd-el-Krim, as being one of the persons responsible for the present situation in the Mediterranean. This

is my meaning. South of the Spanish zone in Morocco was a tract of territory held by a tribe called the Riff. It was a free and more or less independent territory, which was sandwiched between the Spanish zone and the French zone. Neither France nor Spain had made any attempt to conquer this territory, principally because both countries wished to avoid friction in North Africa. There were rumours circulating in various foreign countries that in the Riff country there were very rich deposits of copper. An American mining engineer, the late Mr. Frank Gardner, claimed to have spent six weeks in the Riff territory disguised as an Arab, and he went to Paris and reported that there was enough copper in the Riff to pay the French debt to the United States six times over. Perhaps he was right, perhaps he was wrong, perhaps we shall never know.

The French were lookers-on when Abd-el-Krim and Spain went to war. In the beginning, it was just one of those little colonial wars which gained but little space in the newspapers. Then the Spaniards suffered one defeat after another, and as I have already suggested, the war in the Riff was a serious body blow to the Spanish Monarchy. There was a mysterious Englishman who, during the war between the Riffs and the Spaniards, was acting as a sort of

adviser to Abd-el-Krim. Abd-el-Krim suffered from what the French call "*folie des grandeurs*." He saw himself as a great independent Sultan. He formed a sort of Government and he appointed a Minister of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Ward Price, a famous English journalist, paid a visit to Abd-el-Krim, and Abd-el-Krim entrusted him with a letter which he requested Mr. Ward Price to take to the then British Prime Minister, the late Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. The letter, I believe, was a request that the British Government should recognise the independence of the Riff Republic.

Having thoroughly defeated and routed the Spaniards, Abd-el-Krim then turned his attention to the French. The French were taken by surprise and suffered several very bad defeats at the hands of these unruly Riffs. The fighting went on right at the very edge of the international settlement of Tangiers. In Geneva, M. Aristide Briand went to see Sir Austen Chamberlain and requested that Great Britain should send a battalion to Tangiers. The late Sir Austen held up his hands in horror. "Why," he exclaimed, "that would indeed make matters worse in the Mediterranean." M. Briand sorrowfully shook his head and went away to telephone to M. Poincaré in Paris. Hence the Paris Conference of 1923.

Although M. Poincaré had eliminated Italy, he graciously permitted Germany to be represented at this Conference. Great Britain and France stated their intention that Tangiers should be permanently neutral, and that the Administration should be in the hands of delegates nominated by the various Powers. Spain came out and demanded that Tangiers should be given to her, because, geographically, it was already in the Spanish zone, which was true enough. The Conference agreed that Tangiers should be neutral, but France and Spain almost immediately violated the neutrality. Abd-el-Krim and his merry men were playing havoc with both the French and the Spaniards, who were now fighting again as allies of the French. The situation was so bad for France that a Morocco Division, which was then in the Ruhr under orders to sail for Syria where fresh troubles had broken out, was switched to Morocco. The war was on, and on a grand scale. What Mussolini afterwards did to the Abyssinians, the French in 1923 did to the Riffs. The Spaniards, eager to take their revenge, helped as best they could. The Riff war finished with the complete surrender of Abd-el-Krim, and France took over the territory, and Spain was able to regain her own territory which she had lost and which was known as Spanish Morocco.

—[*Africa on the Mediterranean*]—

Soon after the war in the Riff finished, I passed that way. Peace had come very quickly. Roads were made, and motor omnibuses were running. The Riffs who had lain behind large boulders and sniped down the French infantry, were now haggling for seats in the motor bus. They offered a couple of eggs, or a bony chicken for a seat, and went on haggling and wrangling until the conductor accepted both eggs and chicken, and then there was peace once more in the Riff.

It must not be thought, however, that because the French are firmly ensconced in Morocco, and that Tangiers is peaceful, offering Morocco slippers and other Moorish wares to trippers landing from cruising steamers, all is for the best in the best of all worlds on the African shores of the Mediterranean. Tangiers, at the time of writing, is governed by a Statute which came into force in 1925. It is due to remain in force until 1948, that is to say for another nine years. Presuming that the war in Spain finishes before 1948, it is certain that whichever side wins, will seek a readjustment of the existing circumstances in Tangiers. In 1923, Spain was disgruntled because she thought she had lost many things she should have had. Germany, not at all strong, was also dissatisfied. Italy, who had tried to enter the Conference

room, had been flung out and was more than dissatisfied; she was right down mad. Therefore there are several reasons for believing that we have not yet seen the end of the troubles of Tangiers.

Algeria is nominally a department of France. This gives France the sole rights to administer Algeria as she would administer any department in the homeland of France. I have referred to the polite fiction that Morocco is a Protectorate. Because Morocco is a Protectorate, and because Algeria is part of France, there is a Customs barrier between the two French Colonies. The Bey of Algiers is, however, just as much nominee of France as his brother monarch, the Sultan of Morocco. Morocco has a Sultan of the choosing of France. The present young man who sits rather moodily in the Palace at Fez is a nephew of a former Sultan. There is no direct heritage of the Sultanate of Morocco. The Sultan may nominate an heir, but the nomination has to be agreed by the French Government. Algeria is not to be compared to Morocco when it comes to the question of wealth, but Algeria has a *niche* in the heart of France, because in Algeria there is Sidi-Bel-Abbès, and Sidi-Bel-Abbès is the headquarters of the French Foreign Legion, and the French Foreign Legion is the apple of the eye of France. Not only

has the Legion given Hollywood much of its glamour, but it has provided French films and French novels, and everything that France believes is really and truly African somehow centres around the Foreign Legion. Actually, the Foreign Legion, the so-called "Step-Sons of France," is a rather prosaic organisation which does not seem to abound in glamour. The men of the Foreign Legion live very much like monks in a monastery. They most emphatically resent the publicity which is thrust upon them. I myself have been guilty of writing many articles about the Foreign Legion, but at least I am not guilty of covering the Legion with glamour. Every now and again, a French writer will call attention to an alleged danger because the Legion has so many German non-commissioned officers. It is pointed out that every German non-commissioned officer is a potential German agent. I can think of no statement of greater nonsense. The German non-commissioned officer is a descendant of the old Prussian soldier, who liked soldiering for soldiering's sake.

Behind the northern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean there are powder magazines which are likely to explode at any moment. The southern African shores of the Mediterranean are much safer. Gone are the days when the Moors were the conquerors. No

longer is there any ambition among the inhabitants of North Africa to invade the northern shores of the Mediterranean. The Moors who fight in Spain were taken there by the descendants of the very people they themselves conquered. Yet it would be foolish to underestimate the importance of the North African shores when considering the Mediterranean as a whole. Safety lies in the French method of colonisation. The French have a genius for preserving native habits and customs, and grafting on to that civilisation French civilisation. Regard Fez for a moment, the capital of Morocco, situated in the very heart of the western part of this country. Fez stands at the cross-roads where one road cuts Morocco from east to west, linking the Atlantic with the Mediterranean by means of the famed caravan road which comes up all the way from the Sahara. The population of Fez is below the 100,000 mark. There must be approximately 8,000 Jews living in the walled city. The European population is about 1,500, of whom not more than 1,000 are French. Once within the apricot-coloured walls, one finds oneself in a veritable maze of narrow streets. Fez that is, is the Fez that was, and nothing has changed it. Linked to Fez by a wide and imposing boulevard is the new Fez, the French town. Here is a railway station,

factories, hotels, everything that a modern city needs.

All through French North Africa one finds the same conditions prevailing; the idea behind French colonial expansion in North Africa seems to have been: let the native alone, we can rule him just as well from a distance.

On the whole, the Arabs have responded well enough to this kind of treatment. For the past twenty years, various attempts have been made to cause them to rise up and drive the French out of the country. At one time, there was considerable Communist activity among the natives; then, after a long pause, the Fascists became busy in a manner already indicated. The Communist propaganda was very subtle. The Arab landowner is by nature Conservative. The Communist agents stole the cattle of these native landowners. There were expert cattle thieves employed to break in at night and drive the cattle away. In the morning, the farmer would find a note slipped under the door. The note would say that if the farmer would put three one-thousand-franc notes in an envelope and put it under a stone next to the third kilometre stone on the main road, the cattle would be returned, but if the farmer informed the police, the cattle would never come back. The blackmail

money was intended to pay the Arab cattle thieves for their trouble. In some cases, so I found, the Arab farmers did pay ransom, and sure enough when night fell cattle came straying back alone. What the Communist agents were counting on was for the farmer to start trouble with the police. Some did, many did, but the idea behind the move was that the Arab landowners should be shown that the French were unable to protect them. The Governor of Morocco took stringent action, and within a few months an end was put to cattle stealing, and beyond the publication and distribution of Communist tracts in the bazaars, no further Communist propaganda was to be traced anywhere in Morocco. Since the World War there is no question that millions of pounds have been spent in subservient action to try and break down the French rule. The French, ever vigilant, have managed to cope with all actions which seemed to threaten the power of the French nation in its Mediterranean colonies.

To return for one moment to the Foreign Legion, despite the soundness of this organisation, Germans and Italians have found it possible to enlist members of their own political parties in the Legion and to try and stir up disturbances and even mutinies. The

attempts have failed entirely, because the Germans in the Foreign Legion, and they form the majority, are for the most part anti-Nazi. The Legion also contains a number of Italian anti-Fascists. The German and Italian agents who enlisted in the Legion were not nationals of the two countries mentioned. Sometimes they were Swiss and sometimes Czechs. It is perhaps not generally known that in the ranks of the French Foreign Legion are French detectives, who, perforce, have to keep a close eye on some of the activities of men whose enlistment took place in suspicious circumstances.

Tunis, the eastern section of the French Empire in North Africa, is undoubtedly the most vulnerable point. The map shows that Tunis is the nearest point to Europe. From southern Sicily to the most northerly point of Tunis is barely more than ninety miles. The population of Tunis is nearly two and a half million. But it is to be noted that the French population is almost exactly balanced by the Italian population.

Tunis is a French Protectorate, although the country is ruled, nominally, by the Bey, but he has no more real power than the Sultan of Morocco. The French have been in Tunis since 1881. Whereas the Italian anti-French propaganda in Algeria and in Morocco is

masked, in Tunis it is perfectly open. There is, for instance, an Italian newspaper published daily. Although this paper is liable to French censorship, it is extremely outspoken. Long before the French ever had an official aviation service between France and Tunis, the Italians had a most efficient service. It is true that the Italian service was merely for show; very few passengers travelled in the Italian 'planes, but it achieved its purpose: it showed the natives the power of Italy.

The Italians can point with some reason to their ire and the cause of it. Even when the French invaded Tunis and hoisted the tricolour, the Italians already had a treaty with the Bey which accorded Italy certain privileges. The treaty was made in 1868 and was still in force when the French landed. This agreement remained in force until 1896 and is the foundation of the quarrel between France and Italy on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. So long as Italian colonial authority was not violently aggressive, it was not difficult for Paris and Rome to hammer out a new agreement after the Italian treaty expired in 1896. As soon as the date of expiration was reached, France and Italy drafted out three new agreements. They were due to lapse in 1905 and they were extremely important. For instance, Italian schools were allowed

to be maintained in Tunis; secondly, Italian nationals had equal rights with the French in Tunis. Moreover, Italian settlers in Tunis were exempted from certain French laws. When the agreements expired in 1905, France did nothing about the matter, but let the whole question of renewal or denunciation slide. As soon as the War ended, France denounced two of the three 1896 conventions, and substituted a new agreement which was only for a period of three months, but there was what is to-day called a "Gentleman's Agreement," that this agreement could be renewed at the end of every three months. What Poincaré was after was making French nationals out of the Italian settlers in Tunis. There were many children born to these settlers, and the question became an important one for France. Then came Mussolini, and the breach between France and Italy over the question of Tunis widened.

France had further annoyed Italy by making Bizerte, a port in Tunis close to Italy, an important naval base, by far the most important naval base in the whole of French North Africa.

The French General Staff made no attempt to hide the fact that they regard Tunis as the most important of the three French colonies on the Mediterranean. Tunis is the least rich

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

and the least fertile, but politically and strategically it is certainly the most important.

During the early and latter part of 1938, there were serious disturbances in Tunis, and the French newspapers accused Italy of fomenting these troubles. The authorities came down with a heavy hand, and hundreds of arrests were made. Martial law was proclaimed and peace was restored, but France is keeping a very wary eye on the most easterly of her colonies in French North Africa.

Part III

Corsican Ballyhoo

WHEN the light conditions are right, the island of Corsica can be seen glistening like a huge emerald set in the sapphire Mediterranean. One has only to go up to the utmost Corniche of the Riviera to see this fascinating sight—when the light is right. Since the War, praiseworthy attempts have been made to try and attract foreign tourists to the island of Corsica. A golf course was laid out; several fine hotels were built. Then, of course, Corsica has a very attractive background; Prosper Mérimée publicised Corsica when he wrote *Colomba*, his vendetta novel. Corsica was known to the world as the birth-place of Napoleon Bonaparte, and there were always the bandits!

As the years rolled by, the bandits of Corsica became less and less of a nuisance. They were very much like old man-eating tigers. Their teeth were worn out; a tiger only becomes a

man-eater when he is no longer able to digest his natural prey. Corsican bandits, those who were left, were too lazy to do any real work, so they hid in the *maquis* and occasionally raided a village. Not for years had the Corsican banditti shown their fangs in real anger. Occasionally there was a small sort of smash-and-grab raid, but nothing ever achieved more than three or four lines in a Riviera newspaper. Imagine, then, the sensation in France when in 1931 the French Government announced it was going to track down and wipe out the Corsican bandits.

It was announced that a strong force of armed police was going to round up the banditti and make Corsica safe for whatever Corsica had to be safe for.

Spada was the best known, in fact the only one known by name, of the banditti at large in Corsica. Gruesome tales of Spada began to circulate mysteriously in the French Press. He suddenly became, almost overnight, a sort of legendary Corsican "Scarlet Pimpernel." The best story printed about Spada was about an elderly English spinster who went to Corsica specially to see him. By means as mysterious as they were vague in the newspapers, the spinster lady found Spada in the *maquis*, and spent a week of love with her hero. Then she went home.

—[*Corsican Ballyhoo*]—

Possibly, those who sponsored the story expected a roar to come from England; no roar came, but several journalists were sent to Corsica. I, at that time a journalist, was one of them.

I flew from Marseilles to Ajaccio expecting to see a force of police, armed with rifles, crawling on their bellies across the *maquis*, tracking bandits. What I actually saw was a test mobilisation of a French force strong enough to make one rub one's eyes in wonder.

All this Corsican ballyhoo was to hide from France, and no doubt from the rest of the world, the fact that the French Government had decided at long last to make Corsica an important fortified base in the Mediterranean. Mussolini had already begun to build up a Mediterranean Fleet, and his Air Force. It was not considered expedient to let French public opinion know about this move to arm Corsica. The effect was to make France a laughing-stock for many weeks. It would have been possible to have told the world what was really happening, but, so that the world should not be told, there was a very heavy Press censorship on all dispatches leaving Corsica. There is no telephone line between the island and the mainland, so it was not difficult to control every dispatch sent out.

It is true that there were a number of

gendarmes armed with rifles, but I never expected to see banditti hunted with submarines and torpedo-destroyers, nor with tanks.

In the harbour of Ajaccio there were torpedo-destroyers and submarines. I went to see the British Consul who had his Consulate in his home in a very delightful hotel situated in a shady garden. He was furious, the Consul. A Special Correspondent of a British News Agency had made an appointment to see the Consul. When the Correspondent arrived, the Consul had not yet returned to his office. The Correspondent waited; darkness fell. Still the Consul did not arrive. The Correspondent went off and sent a dispatch saying that it was suspected that the British Consul had been kidnapped by the bandits. In point of fact, what had really happened was that the British Consul, visiting some friends, had been persuaded to stay to dinner and had forgotten his appointment with the Correspondent.

While the armed *gendarmes* went out to search the *maquis* for Spada and another bandit, a full brigade of artillery and tanks landed in Napoleon's home town. Then came several battalions of infantry—all to look for Spada. In order to keep up this ballyhoo, the police really did have to go out and look for Spada. The Corsican banditti were most annoyed; for years and years, nobody had

interfered with them. Now the *maquis* was infested, not only by French police, but by Press photographers and reporters, all wanting to get a good story with pictures of the famous bandit hunt which was now interesting the whole world. There were American Correspondents, and Swedish Correspondents, one Russian, I think, a host of French journalists and several Italians who were kept in the background. It was perhaps for the benefit of the Italians that the Press censorship was imposed, but I was given to understand that the anger of the British Consul at the false report of his kidnapping did in some way help to strengthen the censorship, which, incidentally, caused me one evening's unhappiness.

Thanks to friends in well-placed positions, I was advised of the real truth of the military and naval manœuvres which were taking place all around one, but which one was not allowed to mention. Two British colleagues, one of them the gentleman who had invented the kidnapping of the Consul, did not like my activities; they suspected that I was getting too much information. And they suspected, quite rightly as a matter of fact, that my interest was not at all centred in the bandits. After writing a somewhat long cable describing the colourful scenes which were going on in Corsica, and hinting that there were reasons other than

the banditti for these troop movements, I went with my dispatch to interview the Censor. He made one or two changes and asked me to delete some words, which I did. Then I took my dispatch to the cable office and saw it stamped for dispatch. Then I went back to my hotel and was sitting talking to the Consul when he was called to the telephone. He came back and said that the police required my presence immediately. With great kindness, the Consul said he would go with me. The police wanted to know how I was getting my dispatches past the Censor. I replied naturally enough that I was doing nothing of the kind, and offered to go to the Censor with this particular detective and prove that I had taken my dispatches to him first to be censored. The detective said that a long dispatch that I had sent that afternoon had been stopped. Then the Consul intervened and insisted on knowing who had denounced me. Without a moment's hesitation, the detective replied that it was my two British colleagues who had done so. Then the Consul, the detective and I went to the cable office to find the dispatch which had been stopped. We waited and we waited, and nothing happened. Nobody could find the stopped cable. Then I suggested that perhaps it might be looked for in the cables which had been sent. My guess was accurate.

—[*Corsican Ballyhoo*]—

The cable had already gone, and no doubt had been in London long before the search for it was completed.

A foolish story, all this Corsican ballyhoo, to hide from the world that France, acting absolutely within her rights, was fortifying Corsica, yet there was a sequel to this foolish story.

They found Spada. A fat, middle-aged little man, he was taken handcuffed to the prison in Ajaccio. Then he was put on trial and found guilty. One cold morning in the winter of 1931, Spada had his head chopped off by the guillotine.

★ II ★

Whose Sea?

SIX nations: Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Turkey and Egypt, have their shores washed by the Mediterranean. Two other countries: Yugo-Slavia and Albania, have maritime frontiers on the Adriatic, which is nothing but a backwater of the Mediterranean. Great Britain has no interest in the Mediterranean but a strategic one. Her possessions, Gibraltar, Malta, and Cyprus, are hers by right of conquest. In the eastern Mediterranean, Britain has an interest because of her Palestine Mandate, and has further interests because of Egypt and the Suez Canal. Yet, here again, these interests are purely strategic. From time to time, and more especially since 1935, we hear of Italy's desire to make the Mediterranean her own sea. Whose sea is the Mediterranean?

Mussolini once told the Italian people they must acquire "island mentality." This meant

that Italy must no longer be looked upon as a peninsula. Logically, Mussolini was perfectly right. To all intents and purposes, Italy is an island in the Mediterranean, right in the middle of the Mediterranean, with a population of 46,000,000 to-day, and ever growing. According to M. Camille Aymard, the author of *Le Drame de la Méditerranée*, Italy, including Sardinia and Sicily, has a Mediterranean coastline of nearly 2,000 miles. One-half of the coast-line of Spain is washed by the Atlantic. The Mediterranean coast-line of France is not much more than 400 miles long, but when one takes into account the North African Mediterranean coast-line of France, we find a bigger comparison to the Italian coast-line. The naval conferences which have been held since 1918, have frequently been based on the length of national coast-lines which have to be defended. France herself during the Washington Conference of 1922, based her arguments on this very question. When, however, it came to discussing naval parity with Italy, France refused to accept her length of coast-line as an argument for basing the strength of a rival Navy.

Italy, therefore, with her long coast-line is extremely vulnerable in the Mediterranean. Britain might reply to that argument: but our Mediterranean coast-line is far longer

than yours; it stretches from the Straits of Gibraltar to Port Said. That line, Britain could say, is our life-line; if that is cut, our country starves to death.

The Mediterranean abounds in melodrama, and if Great Britain made any such declaration, it would only be in keeping with the dramatic utterances of others who have made statements concerning their vital interests along and around this sea.

The Greeks could also claim that the Mediterranean is theirs, or a large section of it theirs, because their coast-line is entirely washed either by the Mediterranean, or by its backwaters. Then we could have Yugo-Slavia and Albania also claiming free access to the Mediterranean at all times. Egypt, too, and how about Spain? There is no end to clamour for safeguarding interests, and, naturally, all these claims are justifiable, perhaps more justifiable than the British claim which is based on the right of conquest. Would it not be possible to tabulate all these claims and sit in judgment upon them?

Surely each country will have the good-will to concede that all Mediterranean countries have the equal right to live, a right based on trade, commerce of all kinds borne by ships. Would it not be possible to go even further and

sit around a table and discuss a Mediterranean pact of non-aggression?

If every country with Mediterranean interests could see the Mediterranean problem as a whole, and not as a particular and a national problem, then no time would be lost in coming to an understanding which might guarantee peace in the Mediterranean for generations to come. There is no unbiased person in the world who could accuse Great Britain or France of aggressive designs in the Mediterranean. Yugo-Slavia and Albania and Turkey and Greece and Egypt may be also honourably acquitted of any such charge. Italy and Spain are the two black points on the Mediterranean horizon. Yet there is one other country which has possible designs in the Mediterranean, and that country is Germany. Possibly, one day the world will know why Mussolini changed his policy towards the Anschluss. When Chancellor Dollfuss was assassinated by the Nazis, Mussolini mobilised an Army Corps on the Brenner Pass. There had been rumours circulating in Europe that in the near future a German Army would march into Trieste and hold that important port on the Adriatic, almost on the Mediterranean itself. Then Mussolini changed. Instead of opposing the Anschluss, he welcomed it; he did nothing to prevent the German

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

frontier being marched right up against his own. In May 1938, when the Germans marched into Austria, a new Mediterranean chapter was opened; the last words of that chapter have not yet been written.

We have asked whose sea is the Mediterranean. The logical answer is: nobody's sea. It is the same sea which must be used peaceably by all countries who have legitimate interests there. The operative word, however, is legitimate. Where does that word begin and where does it end?

Until we know what Germany's intentions are, there can be no peace in the Mediterranean; until the war in Spain is ended, we shall not know what Germany's designs are. Until we know how far Italy is prepared to back up the designs of Germany, there will be no peace in the Mediterranean. In the autumn of 1938, world opinion concerning Spain began to crystallise. Those who supported the Government and those who supported Franco had one idea in common: the dislike of a third winter's campaign. There were reports that men fighting for the Government and men fighting for Franco were fraternising in quiet sections of the front. In London, in September 1938, there were strong rumours that Franco was to be displaced and the General who would be appointed

to step into Franco's shoes would be a man who would be amenable to mediation. That was the first sign of sanity which Spain had seen for the past two years and two months.

The present writer, who was in Vienna when Hitler marched in, heard several Austrians say that if Mussolini gave back the Austrian Tyrol, then "for the first time an Italian would be a good fellow." Hitler's policy, carried out to its logical ending, would mean that the German-speaking Tyrol, now in the hands of Italy, must be returned to the German Reich which has succeeded to the properties of Austria. Here again, we come right up against the new Mediterranean policy of Italy. Italy and Germany are partners in the Spanish adventure, but partnerships both international and private are sometimes dissolved, and Germany has never really forgiven Italy for the part of Judas she played in the World War. Therefore there are human factors as well as military, naval and strategic factors which must count in shaping the future of the Mediterranean.

We are at the moment discussing possible peaceful solutions of the Mediterranean problem. It is perhaps, therefore, an opportune moment to examine the various treaties which have been discussed and signed during the post-war years.

In the preceding chapter in this book I have referred to the test mobilisation carried out in Corsica in 1931. It would appear that at that time there was no excuse for the French suddenly making up their minds to fortify Corsica. Yet history relates that it was in 1931 that the Italians conquered and "pacified" Libya; they only achieved this end after sanguinary fighting, when the revolting natives were practically wiped out. It may be that French permanent officials knew that when the pacification of Libya was finished, Mussolini would prepare for the conquest of Abyssinia, and the conquest of Abyssinia would involve a vast amount of trouble in the Mediterranean.

The Franco-Italian agreement was signed on January 11th, 1935, in Rome. France ceded to Italy 114,000 square kilometres of sandy land in Libya. It was not, however, the sand that mattered, it was the strategic and political advantages which Italy achieved which pleased Mussolini. The strategic advantages came as the fact that Italy became the owner of two small villages which commanded the main road from Libya to Lake Tchad. The agreement also rectified frontiers which had been long in dispute between the French and the Italians. M. Pierre Laval, when negotiating this treaty, gave Italy an access

—[*Whose Sea?*]—

to the Red Sea right opposite the British island of Perim, which is close to Aden and which is the southern lock of the door opening on to the Red Sea. Italy also became the possessor of a little island of Doumeirah, a potential submarine and sea-plane base for Italy in the Red Sea.

Mussolini was only waiting for this treaty with France to actively implement his designs on Abyssinia. Hardly was the ink dry on the agreement when Mussolini began to send in troops and material to East Africa. Seven months after the treaty was signed, 100,000 men were already installed, and soon afterwards another 50,000 followed. By the autumn of 1935 there were approximately 300,000 Italian soldiers on African soil. On October 3rd, 1935, the war against the Abyssinians began.

One must not forget that in April 1935 there was the Stresa Conference. It is true that this conference was supposed to deal solely with the question of maintenance of peace in Central Europe, but by making peace in Central Europe, Mussolini had his hands free in East Africa.

In June 1935, Great Britain signed a naval treaty with Germany. The signature of this treaty aroused a storm of indignation in France. The French Ambassador was absent from

his post in London, and the Embassy was in charge of a Secretary who, perhaps, did not take a full account of the importance of the communication made to him by the British Foreign Office. The French Government asked for the explanation of the haste which had prompted Great Britain to make this treaty. Great Britain replied stating that France would have the protection of the British Home Fleet in the event of unprovoked German aggression. There was, however, it seemed, a string attached to that promise: that France should accord to Great Britain the help of her Fleet in the Mediterranean and she should place at the disposal of the British Fleet all French Mediterranean ports, of course, in the event of war in the Mediterranean.

The following month, that is to say in July 1935, the British Fleet began to be concentrated in the Mediterranean. All through the summer, feeling ran high, and more and more British ships went towards the Mediterranean, and in September 1935 a monster Mediterranean Fleet was based on Alexandria.

Italy won her war, and there was no further Mediterranean conference until June 22nd, 1936, when there was a conference at Montreux in Switzerland which lasted until July 20th. Antagonists of Great Britain in Europe implied

—[*Whose Sea?*]—

that Mr. Anthony Eden had manœuvred this conference in order to atone for his failure *vis-à-vis* of Italy in Abyssinia. A previous agreement reached in Switzerland, at Lausanne had neutralised the Dardanelles. The convention of Montreux accorded Turkey the right to mount guns in the Dardanelles. Italy had signed the Lausanne agreement; Italy did not attend the Montreux conference. The intention of the Montreux convention was to draw Turkey into the British camp, which was to be anti-Italian. That much was perfectly clear, I think.

Just as the Italian attack on Abyssinia followed closely on the Franco-Italian agreement, the war in Spain followed closely on the Montreux agreement. On November 1st, 1936, Mussolini, speaking in Milan, stated that it was never the intention of Italy to threaten British sea routes across the Mediterranean. Two days later, on November 4th, Lord Halifax stated in the House of Lords that Great Britain and Italy both had vital interests in the Mediterranean. He said also that it was not a question of which country had the greater interest. On November 5th, Mr. Eden in the House of Commons said that there was no question that for Italy, the Mediterranean meant life itself, and that England had never thought of threatening

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

Italian lines of communication. On November 6th a Franco-Italian commercial agreement was signed in Rome. Three days later, on November 9th, Mussolini, in an interview with Mr. Ward Price, stated that he desired a "Gentleman's Agreement" with Great Britain. Mussolini clarified this statement by saying that what he had in his mind was definite spheres of influence in the Mediterranean. If we go back for a moment to the beginning of November 1936, we may see that at that time a Mediterranean Round-Table Conference was a perfectly possible matter to be discussed by all the nations having interests in the Mediterranean. Mussolini said, furthermore, that British interests and Italian interests in the Mediterranean were not antagonistic, for each one was necessary to the other. Mussolini, in the same interview above-mentioned, referred to Majorca and said categorically that Italy had no thought of ever taking that island.

The interview with Mussolini created a most favourable current of opinion throughout Great Britain, and the British Government was so pleased that it closed up the British Legation at Addis-Abbaba and replaced it by a Consulate. On January 2nd, 1937, there was signed in Rome a "Gentleman's Agreement" such as Mussolini had said he desired.

This agreement was very short, but it was perfectly concise. For instance, it recognised that the British Empire and Italy both had the right to enter and leave the Mediterranean. More importantly, it was set forth that there was no question of modifying or allowing to modify the *status quo* of territory in the Mediterranean basin. If this paragraph meant anything at all, it clearly meant that Italy had no thought of gaining any territory or territorial concessions in Spain itself or in the Spanish Mediterranean territories. The two nations, Italy and Great Britain, entered into a solemn engagement to respect one another's interests in the Mediterranean. The Italian Foreign Office, commenting on this "Gentleman's Agreement," said that Italy could not allow the setting up of a Bolshevik Republic in Catalonia, nor the domination of the Russian Government in Spain. As a matter of fact, the Italian Foreign Office, which is another term for Mussolini himself, had no right whatsoever to dictate the form of Government which might eventually be elected in Spain.

In the Italian Foreign Office statement there is considerable material for hair-splitting argument. What was meant exactly by the phrase "the domination of Russia"? Supposing for a moment that there had been a Communist Republic duly elected in Spain;

would that have been considered a Government under the domination of Moscow? Contrariwise, France or Great Britain might have stated that under no circumstances would it be allowed for Spain to have a Government under the domination of Rome or Berlin, which would have meant a Fascist Government. It is, one may suppose, easy enough to make out a case that it was Mussolini who himself endangered the "Gentleman's Agreement" by making this statement concerning Spain.

In the summer of 1926 the writer was in Moscow, and in conversation with the then Foreign Minister, Commissar Tchitcherine, asked whether the Comintern, which had its headquarters in Moscow, dictated the policy of the Russian Foreign Office. Tchitcherine answered that it most certainly did not, to which the writer answered that in most countries it was thought that it did, and if it did not, why did not the Russian Government expel the Third International and tell it to go and establish its quarters elsewhere. Tchitcherine replied blandly: "Where would you like us to send it: to London?"

If it is true that Moscow would dominate a Communist Government in Spain or elsewhere, then it must be equally true that the Fascist nation would dominate a Fascist

—[*Whose Sea?*]—

Government in Spain, otherwise the allegation concerning Moscow has no meaning whatsoever. It is possible that Mussolini might affirm that if there was a Communist Government in Spain, Russia would have a great stake in the Mediterranean. That seems to me a very far-fetched idea, but nevertheless it is one which must be received with a certain amount of serious attention.

The "Gentleman's Agreement" which Mussolini said he so much desired, came to naught. This was due entirely to Italian intervention in Spain, intervention carried out in such a manner that it was hypocritical to call Italian troops "volunteers." They were Italian conscripted soldiers who went to Spain in Italian troop ships convoyed by Italian torpedo-boats. Italian aeroplanes flew over Spain and dropped Italian bombs. Italian tanks attacked Spanish soldiers. Italian guns firing Italian shells killed Spaniards. And in London, the long-drawn-out comedy of non-intervention was being played.

When it became apparent that the Italian troops and material, as well as the German munitions, were not crushing the Spaniards as had been thought, Mussolini became in a slightly easier mood. He let it be known that he was willing to discuss another "Gentleman's Agreement" with Great Britain. After an

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

exchange of personal letters between Mr. Neville Chamberlain and Mussolini, an agreement was reached in April 1938, but this agreement, it was said, and agreed by both sides, should not become operative until "volunteers" had been withdrawn from both sides of the Spanish conflict. Elsewhere in this work I have pointed out when discussing Franco's reply to the so-called British plan, what withdrawal of "volunteers" would have meant, had it been carried out according to Franco's demands.

It is clear, at the time of writing, that the moment for calling a Mediterranean conference has not yet been reached. The conference, if and when it does meet, can start discussions from a statement Mussolini made when he said that he desired that the Mediterranean should be split up into spheres of influence. That would mean that the question of whose sea is the Mediterranean would be settled for once and all, although when matters such as spheres of influence are discussed by nations, it usually means that each nation tries to attract to it other and smaller nations who, in moments of national peril, would come to its assistance. Perhaps the moment has not yet been reached when the Mediterranean can be regarded as one huge sea in which many nations of equal interests,

not interests based on the length of the coast-lines of each, but on the question of trade, of security, and which might be guaranteed by a mutual pact of assistance. Splitting up the Mediterranean into spheres of influence might be regarded as a useful stepping-stone to the ultimate moment when the Mediterranean could be used by all nations of the world as a maritime name of a passage for ships bound on voyages of peace.

The longer the convocation of the Mediterranean conference is delayed, so much nearer will a definite peril approach for all of us.

In 1935 there was, as we have seen, a grave danger of a breach of the peace in the Mediterranean, but some clever strokes of diplomacy have avoided war. Can war be avoided for ever, unless there is a Mediterranean conference?

★ III ★

War in the Mediterranean

OBVIOUSLY, unless there is a Mediterranean Peace Conference, and a Treaty of Peace is signed between all the nations with interests in the Mediterranean, war will eventually be the result. Matters cannot be allowed to drift for ever and ever.

Some years prior to the World War, English writers on naval affairs drew attention to the benefits the German Fleet obtained from the fact that German ships were designed for service in home waters, whereas British ships had to serve all over the world. A similar argument might be applied nowadays to Italian warships. The Italian Fleet is intended, primarily, for service in the Mediterranean; the British Fleet in the Mediterranean has but two naval bases, Gibraltar and Malta, and perhaps at some future time, Cyprus. The Treaty with Egypt allows the British Fleet to use Alexandria as a naval base, but

—[*War in the Mediterranean*]—

Gibraltar and Malta and Cyprus and Alexandria are all at the mercy of Italian bombing 'planes. Is a blockade of the Italian coast feasible? If the Italian air raids on the British Mediterranean bases are not, let us say, 50 per cent successful, the British blockade of the very vulnerable Italian coast is a possibility. If the Italians were defeated by the British Fleet at the beginning of a war in the Mediterranean, Italy would be utterly defeated without it being necessary to land one British soldier on Italian soil. The geographical situation of Italy, right in the middle of the Mediterranean, gives her a very great strategic advantage; the fortification of certain islands in the Mediterranean gives Italy another great advantage. But, if the Italian Fleet cannot stand up victoriously against the British Fleet, then the Italian bases in the Mediterranean would fall easily enough.

Let us, for the moment, look at war in the Mediterranean from another angle, from the Italian angle. Supposing the British Fleet in the Mediterranean was to be defeated by the Italians, what would be the situation then?

It would not necessarily mean a conquest of England. Even supposing that no other nations fought as allies of England, how could an Italian Army reach the coasts of Britain?

That much is out of the question. We will suppose that the British Fleet has been defeated, and many ships sunk in the Mediterranean. We will go further, and presume that Gibraltar and Malta have fallen into the hands of the Italians. What would be the position then?

We will say that Britain is temporarily driven out of the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal is in the hands, at the Mediterranean end, of the Italians. There still remains the Cape of Good Hope route for supplies coming to England from the East. In other words, a naval defeat of Italy in the Mediterranean would mean the end of Italy, but a naval defeat for Britain in the Mediterranean would not by any means be the end of Great Britain.

There are still several other vital points to consider. We have seen that the naval pact with Germany in 1935 allowed Great Britain to withdraw certain units from the Home Fleet and to concentrate them in the Mediterranean. There was also the tacit understanding, or agreement, if you will, with Paris that the French Mediterranean ports could be used by British ships in time of war. Even if Great Britain went to war with Italy and France did not declare war on Italy, the use of French ports by British warships would be considered by Italy as a breach of neutrality, and France would *ipso facto* have to fight Italy.

—[*War in the Mediterranean*]—

As matters stand, at the time of writing, it is most likely that Germany, in those circumstances, would fight as an ally of Italy. And yet this would not change the situation in the Mediterranean one iota. Not if war breaks out in the Mediterranean within the next two years.

I think two years is a fair estimate of the time that the Berlin-Rome axis may endure in its present form.

Many English and foreign writers have drawn attention to the great danger to peace in the Mediterranean so long as the war in Spain continues, but in the opinion of many, the real danger to peace will come when the war in Spain is over and there are spoils to divide. There will come then to the surface of the turbulent waters of the Mediterranean the question of spheres of influence in the western part of that sea. Perhaps that will be decisive when the moment for the calling of a conference has come; that moment may be late because it has been known that conferences called to discuss peace have led to war.

The present lining up of forces in the Mediterranean is not favourable to Italy. We may count England and France as one unit in the Mediterranean. The Montreux Convention brought Turkey and, in a manner of speaking, Greece, into the orbit of the

Allies. Greece, too, knows that her interests must be with Great Britain and France. Albania is not likely to attempt to ooze out of the Italian sphere of influence, but even if there are submarines operating from the bases of the Dalmatian coast, it could seriously hamper the Italian naval strategy in the Adriatic so that perhaps that would neutralise the Italian use of the Albanian port of Durazzo.

The Dardanelles would be open to the Russians coming out of the Black Sea. Perhaps no great help could be expected from the mysterious Russian Fleet, about which so little is known. Very little is known either about the Turkish Fleet.

Early in 1934 when I was in Turkey, I met a naval attaché of a great power. He had come from the Rome Embassy, because Greece and Turkey were his "pigeons." He told me that no foreign naval attaché was ever able to obtain any information about the Turkish Fleet. Whenever this particular attaché wished to visit the Fleet, there was either an outbreak of disease, or else the Fleet was manœuvring in a forbidden zone.

The Greek Fleet is small, but competent authorities consider it to be very efficient.

Apart from the number of ships, their tonnage and the guns they carry, nothing very definite is known about the Italian

Fleet. In the last analysis, it is the man behind the gun who counts, more than the gun itself. News reels show the Mediterranean skies filled with Italian aeroplanes. Ships flying the Italian flag steam in serried ranks across the sea. This is most excellent propaganda. Years ago, the United States Government discovered the value of pictorial propaganda in the interests of the U.S. Navy. This writer does not by any means wish to suggest that one should under-rate the virtues or power of the Italian Navy, rather the reverse, but nevertheless do not let us underrate the strength of the British Navy which has very often proved its worth. The Italian Navy has yet to prove itself.

Look round the Mediterranean, even now when war in Spain is still in progress, and you will find that Italy, despite her new ships and thousands of aeroplanes, and her situation of such marvellous strategic potentialities, is yet quite alone in the Mediterranean. Neither north, apart from Germany, nor east, nor west, nor south, is there one ally, unless you can count little Albania as an ally. Germany, to the north, cannot send one man-o'-war into the Mediterranean so long as Britain bars the way; let us remember that, and although we do not wish for war, let us not return to Munich.

★ IV ★

Mediterranean Blues

I SEE the Mediterranean as the world's playground, but a playground which may turn into a gigantic battlefield. While the tideless sea lazily laps the coast-line, let us take a leisurely tour.

Here is Barcelona, awful, dusty, a city teeming with life. Great hotels, fine restaurants, a night-life which is truly Spanish. Wander away from the centre, go through narrow winding streets and strike the district which is more Moorish than Spanish. Here are tiny little wine shops where somebody is tanging a guitar, and in a whining voice sings songs which are ageless. Fight your way past the brothels, where fat women try and drag you inside. A motley crowd surges through the streets. Vice of every kind is round you. Here are two youths of sixteen or seventeen; eyebrows pencilled, cheeks rouged, and thrown over their backs are pieces of

canvas sacks. Each youth has a flower hanging from the corner of his mouth. Hands on hips, they swagger along like Carmens of the gutter.

A vague dread of an unseen and almost unknown terror hangs over Barcelona. Then out of the night comes a humming monster, and in a flash cries follow explosion. Barcelona under bombs. Another scene of the Mediterranean is emerging.

In the low-lying marshlands near the sea, in the western section of the French Mediterranean coast-line, gypsies are gathering for their annual convention. From all over France, they have come to gather here and elect their King. Further along, ancient Roman cities are perched high like eagles' nests in the mountains. Grey stones look down upon long lines of motor-cars carrying their owners in search of pleasure. Magnificent roads, eating-houses for all purses; sunshine in the winter, sunshine in the summer. Tennis-courts, swimming-pools, golf courses; the glory of the pleasure-seeker. Petrol pumps, villas with terrace gardens; blue-black nights with brightly shining stars.

Golden sands; sweating bodies. Troops of English dancing girls hammering out the beat. Gigolos and harlots. A Maharanee who can't pay her bills.

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

Rien ne va plus. A white-coated barman shaking up a martini and lending an impecunious Englishman a thousand francs. The stench of human bodies. Fragrance of eau-de-Cologne; the scream of grinding brakes and a head-on crash. Moonlight over the Mediterranean.

Promenade des Anglais. Charlie's Bar. Houndsditch, Bloomsbury and Marble Arch.

The secret rain. It must not be mentioned in the English newspapers. A bawdy old Englishwoman in a hotel up in the mountains. She is murdered. The boy friend is put on trial and acquitted. The young niece returns to England.

The Riviera.

The white dust lies thickly on the leaves of the olive trees. There is no water in the rivers. There is a high tree at the corner of a narrow street which has the smell of Indian curry. The Englishman in the villa across the road is a Consul from a Mediterranean island. Whitehall does not know he is here.

The "kitchen" is full to-night; the Salle Privée is not so full. Monte Carlo is learning the meaning of economic depression.

They say the Windsors are coming. The yellow mattresses on Eden Rock look like loathsome fungi. The smell of the eucalyptus trees gives me a headache.

—[*Mediterranean Blues*]—

The Aga Khan's handicap at golf is twelve. The motorcar which ran over the dog was driven by a man who said he was the youngest son of an English peer. The Côte d'Azur.

Toulon still has its opium dens. Every French colonial who wants to get a pipe knows where to go in Toulon.

Marseilles is a very wicked city. The motor-launches don't run very frequently to the Chateau d'If. There is no such thing as a little garlic.

I lie on my right elbow. My skin is tanning nicely. Sweat glistens on my chest. Those three grey smudges on the horizon are torpedo-boat destroyers. One can imagine the rumble one has just heard was made by the guns in Spain; it was not, of course. That was another sort of storm gathering over the Mediterranean.

"This way to the old bazaar." That donkey has fleas. So have the camels, the dogs, and the Arabs. Algiers is like Nice with a few mosques thrown in. The monkeys in the *Gorge des Singes* are blood-brothers of those in Gibraltar. They too have fleas. Gramophones are all playing whiny Arab songs. Those big men in the burnouses play dominoes all day long. It took me nearly two days to buy this carpet. I drank fourteen cups of coffee in the process. The Mediterranean is not blue to-day;

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

it is grey, and there are many white horses. The passengers who arrived by the steamer from Marseilles were very, very seasick.

When the Foreign Legion band plays, Sidi-Bel-Abbès is worth while. Stout Jewesses and veiled Arab women are as moved by the music as the Europeans. A taxi-driver told me he had been to New York. A copy of *The Times* arrives every day at the station bookstall and a Légionnaire comes to fetch it. He is short and wears pince-nez and looks like he might be a runaway bank clerk.

Convicts make the roads. Their hair is close-cropped, and they wear coarse canvas smocks and look like monks. They seem very happy and laugh a lot. A warder in a tunic which is too tight for him and a head of hair which needs cutting, moves them about in gangs. They are handcuffed to one another, but under their arms are long rolls of brown, crusty bread. Some have live chickens under their arms.

The Arabs play *boule* in dim little casinos. The electric light fails often. Scraggy-necked spinsters from Bath go to the Garden of Allah, and hope to meet a sheik. The sand diviner tells their fortunes and always tells them to come back.

On the French shore again the sky is blue, and so is the sea. The yellow mimosa trees

cover the hillsides; they look from the sea like big yellow powder-puffs.

There are many tunnels on the Italian Riviera. Two *carabinieri* patrol the platform of every railway station. The women working in the vineyards look like gypsies. The narrow streets of Naples' slums have so many strings of drying linen that one cannot see the sky. There are so many saints that every day I see a religious procession. On the Isle of Capri there sits an old man in blue glasses. He made Capri famous; his name is Axel Munthe.

Why are there so many hotels in Genoa?

The Straits of Messina look like they were lit by fireflies. The funicular railway outside Reggio is outlined yellow and looks like a golden milky way lying on a hillside.

Messina is dirty. The huts built for the refugees after the tidal wave are still there. Pock-marked Levantine harlots edge up to you in the night. Mosquitoes bite you all night long. The coffee is good.

Adriatic backwater. The Lido no longer fashionable. Fat-bellied German women offer wide expanse for Venetian mosquitoes. Pola is no longer a naval harbour. Trieste is a sad Austrian city Italianised. The rocky Dalmatian coast invites the foreign tourist. Beneath the Adriatic waters, Yugo-Slavian submarines nose their way. Italian flags fly at Durazzo.

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

The blue Mediterranean again. A sapphire sky. Not a cloud.

“Is that snow?” the old lady asked the Purser. “No, m’am, that’s Greece.” Collapse of old lady. (See *Punch*.)

Soldiers in ballet skirts. Green figs, honey, rolls and butter, and coffee, for breakfast. Hundreds and hundreds of little rocky islands. Scraggy scrub and scraggy goats; the Corinth Canal looks so narrow that it seems uncertain whether our ship will be able to pass. It does, always.

Dirty little boys run along each side of the ship and shout for pennies.

Cypress trees frame the Temple of Jupiter and the Athenian sky. The way up to the Acropolis is very stony. There are two big brothels in Harmony Square. One cannot have a drink unless one entertains a woman. For every drink one orders while the woman is sitting at the table, she receives a metal plaque and she cashes in. The Greek proprietor lived for seven years in New York. The Armenian girl with the ugly cough is in the last stage of consumption. There is a woman’s band playing Viennese airs. They are all young German girls. The Greek soldiers walk about in couples, hands entwined like lovers.

Salonica has risen from its ashes. A dish of aubergines caught fire and burnt the city to the ground.

—[*Mediterranean Blues*]—

In Palestine, they say, there is a new Colonel Lawrence living somewhere in Trans-jordan who one day will quell all the troubles in the Arab world.

There is a high wind in Alexandria. The Mediterranean is mountain high. Huge waves sweep over the breakwater. The storm whistles and screams; doors cannot be shut in the face of the wind, and windows rattle throughout the night.

Port Said lives mostly on hope. Some day someone will find the famous donkey. A Major going home from India claims to have seen the creature in the early nineties. He remembers that it was "somewhere round here," and spends the day in vain quest. . . .

Paradise for pleasure-seekers. A long and glorious pathway to the sun. But across the Mediterranean, right across it, appears the shadow of a mailed fist. Submarines are below the waters; battleships on the surface; and in the skies above squadrons of aeroplanes manœuvre.

I raise myself to a sitting position. I remove my sun-glasses. The last word of this book is about to be written, What shall it be? Shall it be war, or shall it be peace?

THE END

Afterthought

Tunis,
January, 1939.

THE Mediterranean is anything but beautiful and blue to-day. An English journalist accompanying the French Premier to North Africa is so buffeted by the storm that he breaks his arm.

Three French submarines, perfectly aligned, come creeping along the surface of the sea as my ship turns to enter the long narrow channel which leads to Tunis. In a few minutes I learn they have not come across the sea from France, but from the very near-by seaport of Bizerte, which is also a naval arsenal. Nothing I have witnessed here since this latest uproar in the Mediterranean began has impressed me more than the fact that France has strengthened her defences in Tunisia, defences both naval and military, without bringing a ship or a regiment from over-seas. With me there travelled from Marseilles a few airmen, naval ratings and technicians.

—[*Afterthought*]—

And yet, since I have been here, it is quite evident that the number of soldiers and sailors has been increasing. They have come from the neighbouring colonies of Morocco and Algeria, and that is where France is so lucky, to have colonies so near the homeland and so close one to the other.

I have been to look at the so-called Tunisian "Maginot Line". This is a chain of pill-box fortresses, very solid looking, which follow the foothills of a chain of low mountains which run perpendicularly from south of the big "chotts" or lakes which cross Tunisia from west to east. This line ends at the frontier of Tunisia and Libya, a frontier which was fixed in Rome, when M. Laval met Mussolini.

The Italians claim that this agreement does not exist, because it has never been ratified. It has not been ratified, but, nevertheless, the Italians have moved their frontier posts right up to the new frontier line, as it was drafted in Rome. The frontier is nothing but a desolate region of desert land without a visible road or even a well. I saw no villages, just a few tents of some nomad tribe.

The French line of defence looks as if nothing could break it, but the French have little to worry about, because Nature has provided them with an even stronger second line of defence, north of the artificial one.

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

South Tunisia is divided from the north by a chain of lakes. About twenty miles of desert separates the frontier of Algeria from the west end of the chain, and another twenty miles of desert separates the eastern end of the chain from the Mediterranean. That is all the French have to defend from a possible Italian attack from the south. The real defence, about which little or nothing has ever been disclosed, lies to the east, where the territory of Tunisia curves southwards and presents a bastion which divides the Mediterranean into two.

Hammamet Bay, as it is called, is only a few miles from Pantellaria; it is defended by batteries of long-distance naval guns. Towards the end of 1938 a battery just north of Sousse was completed, and when Premier Daladier visited the spot workmen were putting the finishing touches to a battery close to the town of Hammamet.

Bizerte, the huge port already mentioned, has a large artificial lake behind it. When the canal linking the lake with the sea has been widened and deepened, this lake will be as protected as Milford Haven and will be of immense benefit to both the British and French Mediterranean Fleets.

So much for the military advantages and disadvantages of Tunisia. So far as the Italians

—[*Postscript*]—

in Tunisia are concerned, they, with the exception of the professional agitators, are a peace-loving people, the majority of whom came here because they can live better under French protection than in Fascist Italy.

Postscript

Nice
January 29th, 1939.

THE fall of Barcelona echoes along the French shore of the Mediterranean like a mournful cry. The sharply divided sympathies of the French people living as in a cleft stick between Fascist Italy and the forthcoming Fascist Iberian Peninsula have suddenly ceased to be pro- or anti-Fascist; it is now a question of the unknown to-morrow.

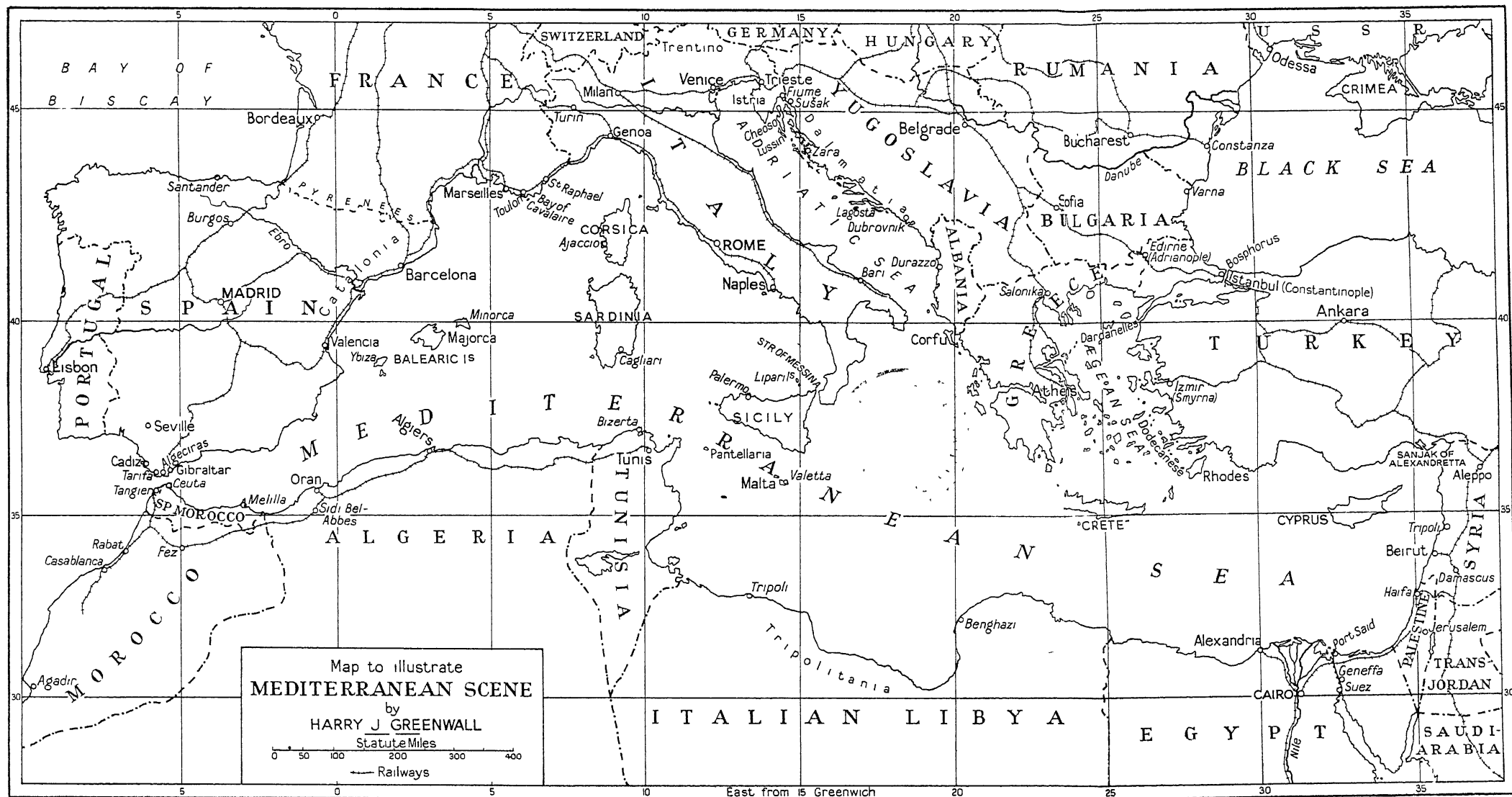
While Mussolini was thundering out threats in Rome in the early evening of January 27, I was motoring along the Middle Corniche towards the Italian frontier. I passed numerous Italian sight-seeing autocars labelled Nizzia, and the cars were full of contented looking

—[*Mediterranean Scene*]—

Italian tourists. Crossing the frontier into France were a number of privately owned Italian cars, about to tour in France. I make no comment, I merely register facts.

I am afraid I am one of those people who want to know what for and why for. I talked with many shopkeepers between Mentone and the Franco-Italian frontier. They say there is less nervous tension than there was last September, when most undoubtedly Italy was less bellicose than she is to-day. Why? *Pardi*, shrug the shopkeepers; we know our neighbours, thousands of them for their own reasons keep in close touch with relatives across the other side, in Italy. They want to know how well Italian newspaper opinion reflects the real feelings of the Italian people. They are satisfied that all the Italian people want is to finish with war, they have been at war since 1935.

Just as I close down this book I learn of the report of a calling of a Mediterranean Conference, for which I made a plea earlier in this work. May the report be true, and may we be sure there will not be a Mediterranean "Munich."



Index

A

ABYSSINIA, 15, 63, 76, 77, 80,
 90, 91, 102, 103, 108, 121,
 163, 164, 166, 184, 222,
 223, 225
 Abyssinia (Emperor of), 121,
 122
 Abd-el-Krim, 10, 11, 193,
 194, 195, 196
 Acropolis, 244
 Addis-Ababa, 226
 Adelia, 8, 9
 Aden, 223
 Admiralty (British), 157
 Adrianople, 18
 Adriatic, 8, 60, 63, 116, 124,
 216, 219, 236, 244
 Aegean Sea, 60, 144
 Agadir, 51, 104, 128, 185, 190
 Aga Khan, The, 70, 241
 Ajaccio, 211, 212, 215
 Alba, Duke of, 28
 Albania, 60, 61, 62, 120, 218,
 219, 236
 Alexander (late King of
 Yugo-Slavia) 62
 Alexandretta (Sanjak of), 63,
 64, 65
 Alexandria, 115, 156, 224,
 232, 233, 245

Algeciras, 125, 148
 Algeciras (Conference of), 189
 Algeciras (Treaty of), 193
 Algeria, 53, 126, 143, 147,
 198, 203, 247, 248
 Algiers, 241
 Algiers, Bey of, 198
 Allah (Garden of), 242
 Amiens (Treaty of), 156
 Anatolia, 15, 20
 Anatolian Desert, 3, 7, 71
Andromaque, 141
 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, 72,
 74
 Anguera, Dr., 48
 Annunzio, Gabriel d', 7,
 100
Anschluss, 219
 Arabia, 161
 Arabs, 66, 67, 69, 82, 182,
 183, 184, 185, 201, 202,
 234
 Armenia, 5, 6, 68
 Armenians, 63, 82
 Armstrong, Lady, 135
 Army Corps (Fifteenth), 134,
 135
 Asturias, 23
 Aymard, Camille, 118, 119,
 217
 Aznar, Admiral, 30

—[*Index*]—

B

BALDWIN, Stanley, 57, 109,
164, 166
Baldwin Government, 164
Balearic Islands, 57, 109, 110,
120, 124
Balkan Pact, 63
Barcelona, 29, 238, 249
Bari, 61, 69, 129, 130
Barrère, Camille, 117
Barthou, Louis, 165
Basques, 47
Beaumarchais, Comte de,
119, 120
Belgrade, 62, 144
Berbers, 182, 183
Berenguer, General, 28, 30, 37
Berlin (Congress of), 158
Berthelot, Philippe, 118
Besnard, René, 117, 118
Bizerte, 205, 246, 248
Black Sea, 60, 72, 236
Blue Nile, The, 73
Boers, 25
Boer War, 3
Bolivia, 168
Bolsheviks, 6, 19
Bolshevik Republic (Cata-
lonia), 227
Bolshevism, 23, 172
Bonaparte, Napoleon, 114,
- 115, 155, 209
Bonar Law, 20, 117
Bonnet, Georges, 65, 249
Bosphorus, The, 72
Bran, (Island of), 145
Brennar Pass, 8, 104, 219
Briand, Aristide, 118, 119,
131, 165, 195
Bristol, Admiral, 18
British Military Attaché, 25,
26

Brussels, 19
Bulgaria, 62, 72
Burgos, 174, 178
Byrd, 34

C

CABALLERO, Largo, 37, 168
Cadiz Harbour, 46
Cairo, 73, 76
Cameroons, 190
Cannes, 134
Cape of Good Hope, 73, 74,
234
Capri (Island of), 243
Caproni, 53
Catalonia, 29, 30, 48, 122
Catalonia (Bolshevik Repub-
lic) 226
Cavalaire, 135
Cavour, 81
Ceuta, 186
Chanak, 18, 19
Château d'If, 241
Cheoso, 8
Chamberlain, Neville, 91,
110, 230
Chamberlain, Joseph, 185
Chamberlain, Austen, 195
Charles, Sir Noel, 179
Church of Spain, 22, 43
Ciano, Countess, 96
Ciano, Count, 103, 179
Cisalpine Tyrol, 8
Clémenceau, Georges, 116
Colomba, 209
Comédie Française, 141
Comintern, 228
Communist Government
Spain, 228, 229
Communist Republic Spain,
227

—[*Index*]—

Condor Legion, 58
 Conferences:
 Algeiras, 189
 Disarmament, 102, 195
 Montreux, 224
 Paris, 193, 195
 Peace (Mediterranean), 232
 Stresa, 223
 Washington, 217
 London (Naval), 130
 Congress of Berlin, 158
 Connecticut (State of), 86
 Constantine (King of Greece)
 7
 Constantinople, 5, 6, 16, 18,
 19, 71, 72, 158
 Constanza, 72
 Copper, 104, 194
 Coren, 146
 Corfu, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 101
 Corinth Canal, 244
 Corsica, 114, 209, 211, 213,
 215, 222
 Cotton, 73
 Court of Spain, 22
 Cromwell, Oliver, 150, 154
 Crimea, 19
 Cyprus, 63, 152, 158, 159,
 160, 162, 216, 232

D

DALADIER, 248
 Dalmatia (Province of), 8,
 62, 144, 147, 160, 236
 Dalmatian Coast, 236, 243
 Dardanelles, The, 60, 71, 225,
 236
 Davies, Sir John, 75, 76, 79
 Delcassé, 187
 Derby, Lord, 158
 Dictator of Spain, 24

Disarmament Conference, 102
 Dodecanese Isles, 109
 Dollfuss, Dr., 104, 219
 Doumeirah, Island of, 223
 Dubrownik, 146
 Duce, Il, 83, 87, 165
 Duke of Alba, 28
 Duke and Duchess of Kent,
 169
 Duke of Miranda, 34
 Duvivier, Jean, 145, 146
 Durazzo, 236, 243

E

EAST Africa (Italian), 95
 Eden, Anthony, 177, 225, 240
 Edward VII, 187
 Egypt, 7, 18, 72, 73, 79, 114,
 158, 185, 186, 216, 218,
 219, 232
 Egyptian Government, 74,
 75, 76
 English Monarchy, 41
 Ericson, Karl, 146
 Eritrea, 90
 Ex-Kaiser, 103, 184, 185,
 187, 188

F

FASCIST Italy, 249
 Fez, 189, 198, 200
 Fez (Treaty of), 190, 198, 200
 Fifteenth Army Corps, 134,
 135
 Fiume, 7, 116
 Fiat Works, 98
 Foreign Legion, 25, 198, 199,
 202, 203, 242
 Foreign Office (British), 17,
 25, 76, 79, 96, 174, 175
 Foreign Office (French), 131

—[*Index*]—

Foreign Office (German), 188
 Foreign Office (Italian), 227
 Foreign Office (Russian), 228
 Four Power Pact, of Rome,
 120
Fortnightly Review, 53
 Franco, Francisco, General,
 53, 55, 57, 58, 59, 107, 109,
 110, 113, 155, 169, 176,
 220, 221, 230, 249
 Franco, Ramon, Major, 37,
 46, 47, 48, 50, 53, 96
 Franco Headquarters, 174
 Franco-Italian Agreement,
 222, 225
 Franco-Italian Commercial
 Agreement, 226
 Franco-Italian Convention,
 119
 Franco's Government, 173,
 179
 Franco-Turkish Agreement,
 64
 Frankfort, 127
 Franklin Bouillon, 20
 Fregoli, 97
 Frejus, 126, 127
 French General Staff, 122,
 124, 125, 205

G

GARDNER, Frank, 194
 Geneffa, 74
 Genoa, 99, 243
 "Gentlemen's Agreement(s)"
 167, 177, 226, 227, 228,
 229
 German Foreign Office, 188
 Gibraltar, 150, 152, 155, 157,
 216, 218, 232, 241
 Gibson, Violet, Miss, 81

Giioletti, Captain, 99
Giulio Caesar, the, 82
 Gladstone, W. E., 16
 Golden Horn, 71
Gorge des Singes, 241
 Gorizia, 8
 Gradisia, 8
 Greece, 6, 12, 17, 60, 62, 63,
 144, 216, 219, 236, 244
 Greece (King Constantine
 of), 7
 Greece (King George of), 11,
 63
 Greek Admiralty, 144
 Greek Empire, 6
 Greek Fleet, 236
 Greek Navy, 61
 Greek Soldiers, 245
 Greeks, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18,
 281
 Guerra, Sanchez, 31, 33, 34,
 35, 37 43,
 Gunther, John, 12, 99

H

HAIFA, 65, 68
 Halifax, Lord, 225
 Hammamet Bay, 248
 Hankey, Sir Maurice, 79
 Harmony Square, 244
 Harris, Walter, 191, 192, 193
 Hartmann, Paul, 145
 Herriot, Edouard, 117, 118,
 120
 Hitler, 103, 105, 107, 170,
 183, 221, 249
 Hoare, Sir Samuel, 102, 164,
 165, 166, 178
 Hodgson, Sir Robert, 178
 Hollywood, 199
 Hong Kong, 152, 157

—[*Index*]—

I

IBERO, Ibanez de, 125
 India Office, 70
 International Brigade, 51, 52,
 179
Inside Europe, 12
 Iraq, 68, 132
 Ireland, 70
 Irun, 125
 Italian East Africa, 95
 Italian Foreign Office, 227
 Italy (King of), 26, 27, 121
 Italy (Queen of), 8
 Ismailia, 74
 Istria, 8
 Itos, 145, 146
 Italy (Fascist) 249

J

JEVENOIS, de, Colonel, 125
 Jews, 66, 67, 69, 82, 172, 182,
 183, 200
 Jouvenel, Henri de, 120
 Juan les Pins, 134
 Juntas, 21
 Jupiter (Temple of), 244

K

KAISER (*see also* ex-Kaiser),
 184, 185, 187, 188
 Kaiser (Ex-), 103
 Kemal, Mustapha, 3, 7, 15,
 16, 17, 18, 20, 64
 Kennedy, 147
 Kent (Duke and Duchess of),
 169
 Kerensky, 44
 Khyber Pass, 161

Kichi, 146
 King of Greece, 7, 11, 63
 King of Italy, 26, 27, 121
 King of Montenegro, 8
 King Alfonso of Spain, 10,
 11, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29,
 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 37, 38,
 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46,
 47, 48, 57, 58, 97, 106, 107,
 122, 123, 169
 Kühlmann von, 187
 Kurds, 64

L

LATAKI, 146
 Lateran Treaty, The, 95
 Lausanne Agreement, 225
 Laval, Pierre, 102, 120, 165,
 166, 222, 247
 Lawrence, Colonel, 245
 League Covenant, 13
 League of Nations, 12, 13, 14,
 64, 72, 77, 123, 163, 166,
 168, 169, 170
 Lenin, 98, 99
 Le Queux, William, 140
 Lerroux, Alexandre, 45
 Lesseps, Ferdinand de, 77
 "Liberté", 118
 Libya, 144, 186, 222, 247
 Lido, 244
 Lipari (Island of), 244
 Lisarica, North, 8
 Lloyd, Geoffrey, 157
 Lloyd George, 5, 16, 17, 20,
 65, 116
 Logor, Island of, 147
 London Naval Conference,
 130
 Lussin, 8
 Lyautey, Marshal, 149

—[*Index*]—

M

MACDONALD, Ramsay, 130,
195
Macia, Colonel, 48
Madrid, 21, 26, 34, 37, 38,
39, 47, 52, 55, 106, 107, 124,
168, 170, 173, 186
Madrid (Mayor of), 30
Maginot Line, 122, 125
Maginot Line (Tunisian), 247
Majorca, 109, 226
Malay States, The, 73
Malta, 87, 88, 115, 152, 155,
157, 159, 162, 216, 232
Malta (Knights of), 156
Manchester Guardian, 35
Mangin, General, 122, 123
March, Juan, 105, 106, 107,
172
Maritza River, 18
Marseilles, 132, 134, 138, 143,
148, 211, 241, 242, 246
Martinez, Anito, General, 26
Massermann, 182
Maura, Miguel, 36
Maures, Montagnes des, 135
Méditerranée (Le Drame de la),
118, 217
Melilla, 186
Mérimé, Prosper, 209
Messina, Straits of, 243
Mexico City, 168
Milan, 225
Milans del Posch, General, 26
Ministry of Marine, 124
Minorca, 109
Miranda, Duke of, 34
Monaco, Principality of, 160
Model Prison, 34, 35
Montagnes des Maures, 115, 135
Monte Carlo, 160, 240
Montenegro, 8

Montreux Conference, 224
Montreux Convention, 225,
235
Moors, 115, 199, 200
Moorish, 126
Morocco, 25, 26, 134, 143,
149, 181, 182, 183, 184,
185, 186, 189, 190, 193,
194, 196, 197, 198, 200,
202, 247
Morocco (Government of), 202
Morocco, Sultan of, 187, 188,
197, 198, 203
Morocco (Spanish), 25, 196
Moscow, 228, 229
Mosul, 65
Mudania, 17
Munich, 237
Munthe, Axel, 243
Mussolini, Arnaldo, 87, 88,
100, 103
Mussolini, Benito, 10, 11, 12,
13, 14, 15, 27, 52, 62, 78,
81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 87, 91,
94, 95, 96, 97, 99, 100, 101,
102, 103, 107, 108, 109,
110, 116, 117, 118, 119,
120, 124, 155, 159, 162,
165, 166, 167, 168, 170,
171, 174, 175, 177, 179,
184, 196, 205, 216, 219,
221, 222, 223, 226, 228,
229, 230, 247
Mustapha Kemal, 3, 7, 15,
16, 17, 18, 20, 64,

N

NAPOLÉON Bonaparte, 114,
115, 155, 209
Naples, 243
Naval Conference (London),
130

—[*Index*]—

Naval Pact (1935), 223, 234
 Navarre, 47
 Nelson, Admiral, 156, 176, 177
 Neutrality Act, 153
 Nice, 134, 159, 241
 Nickel, 104
 Nile (The Blue), 73
 Nitti, Francesco, 90
 Non-Intervention, 176, 178,
 229
 Non-Intervention Agreement,
 56
 Non-Intervention Committee
 52, 56, 176, 178, 179
 North Lissarica, 8
 Nyon Agreement, 176

O

ODESSA, 72
 Ostia, 81

P

PACT (Balkan), 63
 Palacio Chiggi, 81
 Palacio Venezia, 120
 Palestine, 62, 66, 67, 68, 69,
 74, 161, 245
 Palestine Mandate, 216
 Pantellaria, 110, 248
Panther (cruiser), 184, 190
 Paraguay, 168
 Paris Conference, 193, 195
 Payroutan, M. (High Com-
 missioner in Rabat), 53
 "Peace Ballot", 163
 Peace Conference (Mediterranean), 232
 Penang, 152
 Pepys, Samuel, 150
 Perim, 152, 223
 Perth, Lord, 96, 179

"Pertinax", 53
 Petrol, 131, 132, 133
 Pincio Gardens, 84
 Poincaré, Raymond, 10, 11,
 20, 117, 118, 127, 193, 195,
 196, 205
 Port Said, 218, 245
 Primo de Rivera, General, 24,
 27, 31, 32, 124, 173
 Promenade des Anglais, 240
 Puerta del Sol, 55

Q

QUAI d'Orsay, 165, 185
 Quarnero, 8
 Queen of Italy, 8
 Queen of Spain, 26, 39, 41,
 169
 Queen Mother of Spain, 31

R

RED Sea, 60, 90, 91, 92, 103,
 152, 223
 Rhodes, Island of, 109
 Riff, 25, 194, 195
 Riffs, 196, 197
 Rios, Fernando de los (Pro-
 fessor), 36
 Riviera, 240
 Riviera (Italian), 243
 Robles, Gil, 45, 105, 106
 Roman Catholics, 96, 97, 171
 Roman Catholic Church, 94,
 95, 96
 Roman Catholic (Italy), 174
 Romanones, Count, 10, 21, 22,
 24, 30, 32, 39, 42, 43, 44, 57
 Romanoffs, 41
 Roosevelt, President, 122, 153
 Rouen, 140

—[*Index*]—

Ruhr, 117, 196
Rumania, 62, 66, 72, 97
Russian Ballet, 19

S

ST. GERMAIN (Treaty of), 97
St. Maxime, 134
St. Petersburg, 10, 93
Samos, 145
Sanctions, 167, 170
Sanjak (Constitution of the),
64
Sanjak of Alexandretta, 63
Sanjuro, General, 53, 54
San Raphael, 139, 140
San Sebastian, 26
Sardinia, 109, 217
Savoy, 159
Scandinavian Monarchies, 41
Secret Treaty of London, 7
Secret Treaties, 5, 7, 118
Segura, Dr, 28, 47
Selby, Sir Walford, 96
Senegalese, 126
Serbia, 116
Sevilla, 49
Sicily, 110, 157, 203, 217
Sidi-bel-Abbès, 198, 242
Singapore, 152
Smyrna, 17
Soho, 50
Sojo, Anguera del, 48
Somaliland, 90
Sorel, Cecile, 141
Sotelo, Calvo, 106, 107
Soudan, 72
Sousse, 248
South Sea Isles, 147
Spada, 210, 212, 215
Spain (Church in), 22, 43
Spain (Court of), 22
Spain (Dictator of), 24

Spain (King of), 10, 11, 21,
24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31,
32, 33, 34, 37, 38, 39, 40,
41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48,
57, 58, 97, 106, 107, 122,
123, 169
Spain (Queen of), 26, 39, 41,
169
Spain (Queen Mother of), 31
Spanish Constitution, 28
Spanish Morocco, 25, 51, 53
Spanish Parliament, 26
Spanish Roman Catholics,
29, 45
Standard Oil Company, 132
"Stepsons of France", 199
Straits of Gibraltar, 150, 152,
155, 157, 216, 218
Straits of Messina, 243
Stresa Conference, 223
Suez Canal, 60, 67, 68, 73,
74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80,
92, 152, 157, 158, 159, 187,
216
Syria, 62, 63, 65, 68, 70, 132,
196
Syrians, 64

T

TABOUIS, Geneviève,
Madame, 165
Tangiers, 104, 110, 119, 150,
151, 186, 187, 190, 191,
193, 195, 196, 197, 198
Tangiers (Bey of), 191
Tarifs, 125
Tchad (Lake), 222
Tchitcherine, Commissar, 228
Tilbury Docks, 143
Times, The, 20, 191, 242
Toledo (Archbishop of), 28,
29, 47, 114, 126, 138

—[*Index*]—

Toulon, 241
 Trafalgar (Battle of), 176
 Treaties (secret), 5, 7, 8, 118
 Treaty of Algeciras, 193
 Treaty of Amiens, 158
 Treaty (Anglo-Egyptian), 72,
 74
 Treaty of Fez, 190, 198, 200
 Treaty (Lateran), 95
 Treaty of London, 4, 7, 9,
 93
 Treaty of St. Germain, 97
 Treaty of Versailles, 11, 193
 Trentino, 8
 Tribania, 8
 Trieste, 2, 18, 19, 219, 243
 Triple Alliance, 89, 91
 Tripoli (in Syria), 65, 82, 84,
 85, 88, 93, 132, 133
 Tripoli (City of), 83
 Tripoli (Governor of), 82, 84
 Tripolitania, 91, 95, 103, 118,
 143, 149, 190
 Tsana (Lake), 73
 Tunis (Bey of), 204
 Tunis, 110, 203, 204, 205, 206,
 246
 Tunisia, 118, 119, 143, 247,
 248, 249
 Turin, 98
 Turkey, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 19, 20,
 62, 63, 64, 65, 71, 91, 92,
 158, 216, 219, 225, 236
 Turkey (Sultan of), 158
 Turkish Army, 18
 Turkish Conqueror, 20
 Turkish Empire, 9
 Turkish Fleet, 236
 Turkish Government, 18
 Turkish Troops, 93
 Turks, 7, 17
 Turco-Greek War, 17
 Tyrrell, Lord, 96

U

UBANGHI, 190

V

VALETTA, 87, 88, 89
 Vallina, Pedro, 50
 Varna, 72
 Vayo, Alvarez de, 35, 38,
 168
 Venezia (Palacio), 20, 120
 Venizelos, 6, 7, 17
 Versailles (treaty of), 11,
 193
 Volosca, 8
 Volpi, Count, 91

W

WAGNER, Johann, 146
 Ward Price, 195, 226
 Washington Conference, 217
 Waterloo, 19
 Westinghouse Works, 98
 Wilson, President, 116, 163
 Windsors, The, 240
 Wolfram, 104
 Wrangel, General, 19

Y

YBIZA, 109
 Yugo-Slavia, 60, 61, 62, 63,
 116, 120, 218, 219, 243
 Yugo-Slavia (Alexander, late
 King of), 62

Z

ZAHAROFF, Sir Basil, 17,
 105
 Zamora, Alcala, 36, 42

